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Red Rudiger, the Archer;

OR,

The Lady Bertha's Treachery.

A Romance of the Alps.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "NEMO, KING OF THE TRAMPS,"
"IRISH CAPTAIN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHAMOIS HUNTERS.

QUEEN of the Bernese Alps is the Jungfrau, with her dazzling peak shouldering its way up into the blue sky, high above the clouds that hang round her skirts. She looks down on all her sisters as a queen alone may do, and flaunts her white mantle all the year round, secure in her sovereignty.

Even in our days, when the Swiss valleys are traversed by railways, and prosaic trade has mastered all the landscape, the Virgin Mountain is grand and poetical; but when our story opens, more than five hundred years ago, the Jungfrau was wild and savage in its loneliness to the last degree.

High up above the clouds rose the white peak of the mountain, and below the clouds stretched the green Alpine pastures where the cattle and goats were feeding. The valleys were solitary and desolate in appearance on the sides toward Italy and France, but on the north-east the country sloped away toward Germany in a wild confusion of green mountains, dark woods and blue lakes, interspersed with towns and castles, round the great Lake of the Four Forest Cantons.

All the rest of Switzerland is a confused heap of mountains, Alp rising over Alp, with little nooks, tiny valleys and lakelets hidden away up among the clouds.

In one of these little valleys, when our story opens, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, were two young men in the rough garb of mountain hunters, carrying powerful cross-bows.

Both were big and stalwart, both appareled in leather from top to toe; both had the free, rather wild look of mountaineers; and the only difference between them was that one had black

RED RUDIGER'S RESCUE OF LADY BERTHA.

hair, while the other sported locks of the very brightest auburn, ever called "red" by its foes.

Dark-hair was a frank, cheerful, open-faced young fellow, with bold hazel eyes used to scanning the mountains afar off for the view of the distant chamois. The boy with the auburn locks had a hawk nose and a very fierce, excitable look in his blue eyes, where there was here and there a red streak in the cornea. He seemed to be a quick-tempered and rather irritable man, though by no means morose. In size and general wildness of appearance he was the very counterpart of dark-hair.

Both young men were at the edge of a little depression, high up among the nest of mountain-tops. It was hardly big enough to be called a valley, for it measured but some two hundred feet across, but in the midst of it shone like silver a little round pool of water, while all around was grass of that vivid, intense green peculiar to Alpine and Arctic vegetation.

The two young men were lying down at the very edge of the cup-like depression, their heads hidden behind little tufts of bushes, and from this station they commanded an extensive view of the mountains, alps and valleys for many miles around.*

Above them were the glaciers, not five hundred feet away, and below them were the valleys where the goats and cattle fed; but around them, on the same level, there was clear, pure air; for they were above the clouds now, and all seemed to be perfectly solitary.

Both of the hunters, for such they were, kept profound silence, and watched eagerly over the lip of the cup-like valley.

Presently the red one put out his hand softly over the grass and pulled the other's sleeve. They had been looking in opposite directions. The dark one slowly and cautiously turned his head in the new direction, and beheld the well-known outline of the head of a chamois over the top of a cliff, from which they were separated by a chasm some thousand feet deep, though not more than five hundred feet across.

The fierce blue eyes of the auburn-haired hunter were now blazing with excitement, but his motions were as stealthy and careful as those of a beast of prey, creeping within the proper springing distance. Slowly his hand went out for his cross-bow, and as slowly he turned over on his side and began to wind up the powerful weapon.

There were many advantages attending the use of the arbalist or cross-bow in those days over that of the long-bow, which was the favorite in England. At the same time it had its disadvantages, as could be seen on the present occasion.

True, the short, heavy steel bow was five or six times as strong as any long-bow ever made, and would send its shaft whizzing, straight and true, for more than a quarter of a mile. But, on the other hand, here were two hunters with these powerful weapons, which they did not dare to keep bent all the time, compelled to turn the slow winches by main force, as stealthily as possible, in full view of the game, ere they were ready to shoot.

While the red hunter wound up his arbalist as best he could, lying on his side, the dark one remained watching the distant head of the unsuspecting chamois.

The graceful little animal came boldly out on the edge of a sheer precipice, feeding close to the very brink, ever and anon raising its head up, crowned with little black hooks of horns, and glancing suspiciously round.

Presently up came another head against the sky-line, and then another and another, till the delighted hunters perceived that they were within easy shot of a flock of more than a dozen chamois. Such sights are seldom seen nowadays, but in the fourteenth century game was plentiful in the Swiss mountains.

Presently the red hunter uttered a low, almost inaudible hiss, as a signal to his companion that he had bent his bow, and then he turned over again on his breast and softly placed one of the square steel bolts, called "quarrels," in the groove of the cross-bow.

The dark one saw that his friend was ready to watch in turn, so he betook himself to the occupation of winding up his own cross-bow, which was soon finished.

Then the two lay down once more to watch their game and select the prime victims.

This did not take long, and the red hunter held up three fingers of his right hand as a signal that he intended to take the third chamois from the right. Dark-hair said nothing, but fixed his aim on another, and then—

"Twang! Twang!"

Both bowstrings sprung after their quarrels with a formidable rush of sound, and away went the shafts with a whiz and a flash in the bright sunlight.

Almost at the same instant, up leaped two of the chamois in the air only to fall again, and away went the rest of the flock at full speed up

* The word "Alp," so frequently used in Switzerland, means an upland pasture on the mountains just below the snow line.

the mountain side, scattering the gravel and stones in a shower behind them.

"Well done, Red Rudiger!" cried the dark-haired young hunter, springing up without more concealment. "As pretty a shot as ever flew from the skirt of Jungfrau. What will Hilda say when we get back to the Rigi with chamois beards got in one day?"

"She will say we were good hunters to take them at a single shooting," was the reply with a proud smile, as Red Rudiger watched the fast-vanishing forms of the chamois. "I would only that White Rudolph had been here, for then should we have had three. But he is always out of the way when he is wanted."

"He's after the White Chamois for the Lady Bertha," answered he of the dark hair, with a light laugh. "The man dreams of nothing else but winning the proud lady's flinty heart with a chamois beard, forsooth. Eh, Rudiger, what fools these lovers are."

For some reason or other Red Rudiger flushed up, and his eye had an angry gleam as he retorted:

"Speak for thyself, Black Max. A man can love a lady if he will, and count it no folly, even if he be born a peasant. Rudolph, as we know, is of noble blood, though he hunts with us for the nonce. And as for the Lady Bertha, what knowest thou of her heart, flinty or soft? A long tongue is no honor to a man."

Max Brugg, or Black Max, as he was called in the familiar mountain phrase, made no answer to this unexpected rebuke. He was a merry, fearless fellow, himself in love with Hilda Stauff, sister to Red Rudiger, and did not care needlessly to offend his irritable companion. He had known before that the ruddy chamois-hunter admired the Lady Bertha of Unterwalden; and began to suspect now that he, as well as Rudolph, was hopelessly in love with that proud lady.

Red Rudiger, having spoken his mind, led the way down the side of the ravine which separated them from their dead game; and for the next half hour both hunters were too much occupied with the bodily exertions necessary to cross the chasm to devote any time or thought to matters purely sentimental.

At last they reached the foot of the ravine, which was occupied by a rapid rushing stream, flowing from the foot of a glacier which had once filled the whole chasm, splitting the solid rocks asunder by the resistless power of the ice.

The other side rose before them, a sheer wall of rock, seemingly inaccessible; but, nevertheless, offering to the experienced mountaineer certain little ledges and crevices where stunted bushes afforded precarious grasp to a climber.

Red Rudiger, after a short survey of the ground, was about to undertake the ascent, when he was startled by an exclamation from his companion:

"Look! Look!"

Then came the rapid patter of feet and a shower of gravel and stones, as something white and agile went bounding up the almost perpendicular sides of the ravine, revealing to their eyes the animal whose existence they had almost begun to doubt.

"The White Chamois!" shouted Black Max, enthusiastically, and down went the stirrup of his arbalist in a moment, while he commenced to wind up the winch with frantic energy.

Red Rudiger was quicker than his companion, and had his steel bow bent and a quarrel in its place ere the strange creature had gained the summit of the precipice up which it was bounding as if it had wings. Just before it reached the summit up went the weapon to the hunter's shoulder and the bow twanged again.

In that very instant, and, as it seemed to Max before the shaft had time to get there, the poor little chamois gathered itself into a ball with a bleat of pain, and came falling down the crag into the brook below, stone dead.

Red Rudiger uttered a sort of joyful, gasping cry, and ran to grasp his prey, when a loud, clear voice came down the chasm from the cliffs above, shouting:

"Leave it alone! I shot the chamois!"

"Now, by heavens, thou liest, whoever thou art," was the passionate answer of Red Rudiger, as he still ran on and dragged the white chamois from the bed of the brook.

"Leave it alone, I say, or I shoot," cried the voice above so menacingly that the red-haired hunter obeyed as by an instinct, and looked up.

There, at the very edge of the precipice, looking down as fearlessly and unconcerned as the wildest of the chamois, stood a tall figure clothed in leather, and having long fair hair flowing over its shoulders.

"By St. Hubert, 'tis White Rudolph," cried Max Brugg, merrily. "The chamois must be his, after all, Rudiger, for he has been hunting it for a month past."

"Black or white, red or gray, noble or peasant," was the angry reply of Red Rudiger, "no Rudolph, be he ever so noble, takes my prey from me. Come down, boaster, and show how this beast is thine, if thou darest."

All the while he was speaking he was hard at work winding up the winch of his arbalist, and

as he finished he pitched it to his shoulder, hastily throwing a quarrel into its groove.

But that quarrel never sped on its mission of anger upward. Before Red Rudiger could settle to his aim, came a sharp twang from the top of the cliff, and the arbalister below uttered a furious curse, while the man at the top of the cliff laughed out:

"Get thee a bowstring, Rudiger, and then look for thy shaft. Here it is."

Max uttered an exclamation of extremest wonder below.

So accurate was the aim of the archer above that he had actually cut the string of his enemy's cross-bow in twain with a bolt without doing any other damage, and now he might be seen leisurely descending the cliff, swinging himself from bush to bush as carelessly as if he ran no danger. When about half-way down, he drew from his belt a spare quarrel and threw it down to Red Rudiger, who was sulkily replacing the cut string of his arbalist with a new one.

"See if thou knowest that bolt, my red one," cried the fair-haired stranger, gayly. "I drew it from the dirt by the place I struck my chamois."

The bolt fell at the feet of the red hunter, who started slightly, picked it up and examined it closely, while the other continued to descend the cliff. Black Max came up to his companion and looked at the bolt with equal care.

"It's thy bolt, sure enough, with thy stamp on it," he remarked to Rudiger; "and it has dirt enough on it to have come from the cliff side. He must be right, for thou shotst but two shafts to-day."

Red Rudiger made no answer. He was deeply mortified at his failure and did not want to confess it.

In the meantime the fair-haired stranger came down the rest of the cliff, with his arbalist slung at his back; his long alpenstock, with its steel spike and hook, assisting him materially in his descent.

When at last on the floor of the ravine, he stepped up to Red Rudiger and asked:

"Well, know'st thou the shaft yet? Of a surety I do, for it came too nigh me to be pleasant. Who shot the chamois, think'st thou?"

"I must have shot through and through him," was the sullen reply, at which White Rudolph smiled slightly and then turned away to the dead chamois as it lay by the bank.

"Look here, then," he said, as he lifted up the body and showed the shaft of a quarrel still imbedded in the flesh. "Tell me that is *thy* shaft and I say no more, for thou never liest. Is that *thy* shaft, Red Rudiger Stauff?"

Rudiger looked long and earnestly at the shaft of the quarrel, which bore on one side the stamp of a boar's head, and finally he turned away, saying:

"No. It is thy stamp. The game is thine, and I was wrong. Thou hast always the luck, with thy high ways and white hands."

The man called Rudolph came a little nearer and said, in a tone of remonstrance:

"Be not unjust, Rudiger, my sworn comrade. I hunted that creature for three weeks, and I have him at last, while thy chance came to thee all in a moment. Give me thy hand."

Red Rudiger's face worked a moment, and then he struck his horny palm into the white hand of the other and grumbled out:

"Thou deservest it. A curse on my luck. Go to the lady and win her."

White Rudolph came closer to him and then one might perceive that the two men were marvelously alike in form and feature—in all save color of hair like enough to be brothers.

"Not so, Rudiger," he said. "There is graver work than seeking fair ladies for us. Frederick of Austria is coming from Constance to take away the liberties of the cantons. Our friends meet to-night at the Springs of Grütli. Who will come there with me to fight the Austrians?"

Red Rudiger flushed up with pride and pleasure as he answered:

"That is different. Black Max and I will come."

"Then we must be on the way," said Rudolph. "It is a long journey there. Come, my brothers of the Jungfrau, the freedom of the cantons is in our hands. Let us go."

CHAPTER II.

WHITE RUDOLPH.

THE full moon shone down on the glassy waters of Lake Lucerne on the second night after the meeting of the hunters of the Jungfrau, and cast black shadows from the precipitous shores of the lower arm of the lake beside Altorf.

Lake Lucerne, better known on the spot as the "Vierwaldstätter See," or "Lake of the Four Forest Cantons," is shaped much like a great Roman cross. Lucerne Bay lies up at the head in the north-west, Alpnach Bay forms the western arm, Küssnacht Bay the eastern limb, while the Lake of Uri, bordered by Brunnen, Altorf and Grütli, stretches the foot out for many a mile to the south-east.

On the eastern banks of the lake lie the cantons of Uri and Schwyz, the latter fated to give

a name to all of Helvetia. On the western side are the cantons of Lucerne and Unterwalden, and in Unterwalden lie the renowned Springs of Grütli.

Soft shone the moon over the Springs of Grütli that night, five hundred years ago and more, below the lofty cliff of the Mythenstein. Right in the midst of the dense black forest was a little green meadow, sprinkled with daisies and violets in the early spring, and in the meadow was a flat rock from which gushed three little springs, and these were the Springs of Grütli.

The bells of the minster of Lucerne were tolling the last strokes of twelve, the Austrian sentinel on the ramparts of Unterwalden Schloss had composed himself for a doze in his sentry-box, and hardly a light twinkled in hall or cottage throughout the Four Forest Cantons, when a number of dark figures stole silently through the woods toward the meadow of Grütli.

They came from all quarters, singly or in groups of two or three, never more together. But they all seemed to know where they were going, and to have no hesitation as to the road.

In the midst of the little meadow of Grütli stood three men, all tall, broad and stalwart, all bearded and past middle age, all in the dress of farmers.

As the different groups assembled in the meadow, these three men received them with grave, silent bows, till there were three-and-thirty burly figures grouped round the Springs of Grütli.

Then one might notice that all these men were armed with swords, that most of them carried maces with terrible spiked heads, and that more than one wore steel caps and breast-plates over their common country clothes.

Then, when the assembly was completed, the oldest of the three men spoke:

"Are all here, and are all true to the ancient liberties of the cantons?"

"All are here, Werner Stauffacher," was the reply of another. "Each of us has his ten men, who have suffered from the Austrian."

"Who is ready to swear to die for the freedom of the cantons?" pursued the old man, looking round him.

"We! We!"

The answer was low and deep, but it seemed to be heartfelt.

Then he who was called Werner Stauffacher turned to one of his three original companions and said, aloud:

"Speak, Walter Furst, and tell them what has happened in Uri. Let our brethren know what crimes these Austrian nobles commit in the name of their liege lord."

Walter Furst stood forth, a giant in stature and strength, with a grave sensible face and a quiet way of expressing himself.

"I left the Canton of Uri last night," he said. "Ye all know how our late lord, the Emperor Rudolph—God rest his soul!—confirmed our liberties to us, as vassals of the empire, to pay no imposts to any but the empire, and to furnish no military service save at the call of the emperor."

"We know it, and we will keep to our liberties," interjected one of his hearers, a sentiment marked by an approving "Ay," from all present.

"Well, he is dead, and his son Albert, who is only Duke of Austria, tries to take away our charters. He has sent Herman of Schwyz, surnamed Gessler, 'the Beater,' who has treated our best citizens with stripes and chains, and now has imprisoned William of Altorf, that our people call Tell, 'the Bold!' I left William in chains at the Schloss of Altorf, because he had refused to do homage to the cap of Austria. Men of the cantons, who will join me to rescue Tell and punish this Gessler?"

"All of us! All of us!" was the deep reply, as if all meant it.

Werner Stauffacher looked round and turned to his second comrade.

"Arnold of Melchthal, speak thou, and tell us what the Austrians have done to thee."

A man with a gray beard, one whose huge frame was beginning to bow with age, answered:

"The proud Baron of Seelsberg rode through the harvest fields and saw my daughter, Elsa, as she bound after the reapers. He sent me word by his falconer to bring the girl to his castle or he would come and take her. Elsa is my only daughter and she is fair. What shall I do, men of the cantons?"

There was a deep, smothered groan of indignation as the old man told his simple story, and Walter Furst spoke out in reply:

"Who thinks that the Baron of Seelsberg should die, let him say it!"

"Let him die!" was the response in the same deep tones.

Then said Werner Stauffacher:

"It is enough. We are agreed. Now, how shall we do it? The cantons must be roused, the Austrians put out, and the men of Schwyz, Uri, Lucerne and Unterwalden stand as one together. Who will volunteer to strike the first blow for freedom?"

There was a silence on this, for the men met

in this midnight conclave knew that the country was full of Austrian castles and garrisons, and that the task of beginning armed resistance was a perilous one.

The silence lasted over a minute, till a stir arose in the outskirts of the group, and a tall man dressed in complete mail with very light flaxen hair flowing from under his steel cap made his way toward the center, closely followed by two others, his very counterparts in personal appearance as to height and strength. One of these followers had red hair, the other black.

The fair-haired man came to the front before Werner Stauffacher, and said:

"Since you, who have suffered wrongs, hesitate, I, who have only seen the wrongs of others and pitied them, will strike the first blow! Here am I, with my comrades, hunters of the Jungfrau, where no bailiffs dare come; and I offer to give you up the Castles of Unterwalden and Seelsberg in three days if you will follow my advice."

Werner Stauffacher looked at him long and steadfastly.

"Who art thou?" he asked. "We are men of the forest cantons. How camest thou here? I know thee not. How are we to know that thou art true to our cause?"

As he spoke, he made an almost imperceptible sign to his friends, and the three strangers were left in the midst of a ring of pale, angry-looking men, who eyed them with suspicious gaze.

White Rudolph—for it was he—looked round with a proud smile.

"You ask me who I am. I am Rudolph, Count of Schönstein, and my castle in the Tyrol is the center of a hundred retainers. I have left it to become a mountaineer for the love of a maiden in these cantons, and now I am only White Rudolph of the Jungfrau, an archer of the Alps. That is who I am, men of the cantons."

"It is very well," answered old Werner, grimly. "Thou art an Austrian. How camest thou here?"

"In the place of Anton of Melchthal, who has been taken by the Baron of Seelsberg as a hostage for his sister Elsa," was the bold reply. "I saw the baron's followers seize him in the forest as he tended his swine, and I shot one of the men, ere I made my own escape."

Here old Arnold of Melchthal uttered a sharp cry.

"My son! is he taken?"

"He is safe from bodily harm," said White Rudolph, "as long as the baron hopes to secure his sister. I saw him taken, this very evening, and I came hither straight, for he had told me of this meeting ere the baron's retainers appeared."

"All this is good," said Werner, in a more mollified tone; "but how are we to know that thou art not a friend to Austria in disguise, to spy out our plans and deceive us with foolish tales?"

"Ay, ay, tell us that," was the low cry from the circle of pale, excited men, and the bare idea seemed to be working them up into a frenzy.

White Rudolph looked around him with the same proud smile that he had worn ever since he first came forward into the group.

"You wish for a proof of my fidelity?" he said, half inquiringly. "You shall have it. You men of the cantons think you know a great deal of what goes on round you. Do you know who is Emperor of Germany to-day?"

"Albert of Hapsburg," answered Walter Furst, promptly, "since Adolph of Nassau was beaten."

"And do ye know where is this Albert of Hapsburg?" pursued the fair-haired hunter.

There was a silence, till he answered his own question.

"I will tell you. Albert is in his grave. He was stabbed to death by John of Swabia, not three weeks ago, and the new emperor, Lewis of Bavaria, has declared for the cantons, while Duke Frederick of Austria, his rival, is on his way hither with an army of thirty thousand knights and men-at-arms to subdue the free cantons to his will. He summoned me to his standard as his vassal. I refused, and here I stand in the midst of you all, an attainted noble, with a price on my head, because I would not fight against the free mountaineers of Lucerne. Is that enough, and will ye trust me now, men of Grütli?"

There was a deep and breathless silence while the exiled noble told his startling news, and then old Arnold of Melchthal said, cautiously:

"If this be all true, we are in fearful danger and must act quickly. If the duke's army reach here while his men are in full possession of the country, we are all undone. What is thy advice, Count of Schönstein?"

"I am no count nor noble, now; I am but Rudolph, the Hunter of the Jungfrau. I left my title with my castle. Call me Rudolph, or White Rudolph, as ye list."

"What is thy counsel, White Rudolph?"

"My counsel is this: We must strike to-morrow night at the latest. Let Arnold of Melchthal send word to the Baron of Seelsberg, that

if the baron release young Anton at once, Arnold will bring his child Elsa to the baron the next day, before the hour of noon."

"Never!" broke in the old man, in a tone of the bitterest anger. "Sooner will this hand slay her myself."

"Be patient and hear me," said the tall hunter, waving his hand. "I said—send him word to that effect—no more. Anton will be released, and when the child Elsa goes to the castle, there will be a hundred men waiting at the gate to receive her, and do justice on the baron. Do ye comprehend, yet?"

Werner Stauffacher was the first to answer.

"The plan is a good one, but there is the Baron of Unterwalden, whose Schloss must be taken first, ere we can hope to hold Seelsberg. How shall we take Unterwalden Schloss?"

"Follow me, and you shall be masters of that castle before the sun rises," answered White Rudolph, boldly.

There was a general exclamation of wonder from all present.

"To-night?"

"Ay, to-night! I only impose one condition."

"And what is that?" asked Werner, with all the caution of his Swiss ancestry.

"That there be no blood shed that can be avoided," was the reply. "Look you, men of the cantons, we are few, and our foes are many. In our hills we have a firm defense, and we are too poor to bring robbers on us from afar. Nevertheless, remember that revenge will call a man further than gold, and that if we show needless cruelty to Austrian nobles, their relatives will avenge them. Therefore, let us resolve to slay none that surrender, but to conduct our efforts so that, once cast out, these Austrians will not wish to return. Am I right?"

"White Rudolph of the Jungfrau is right," said Walter Furst, sentimentally. "Let us hear his plan to take the Schloss of Unterwalden."

"It is very easy," answered White Rudolph, with a smile. "There is a woman in the castle who will open to us. Come nearer, and I will tell you all."

CHAPTER III.

LADY BERTHA OF UNTERWALDEN.

THE castle of Unterwalden resounded that night with the sounds of revelry, and the only sleepy personages to be found were the poor sentries on the ramparts, who had no share in the feasting.

Outside, the full moon shone down on the dark, silent forests, the green Alpine pastures, where the cattle and goats lay asleep in the warm summer night, on the glassy mirror of Lake Lucerne, the snowy caps of the Bernese Alps, and the green slopes of the Rigi. All without was silent and peaceful.

But, within the great hall of the castle, torches and lamps blazed on the armor hanging by the wall, and the tinkle of lute and castanet showed where a troop of morris-dancers were dancing for the amusement of the guests, while the Baron of Unterwalden laughed under his yellow beard at the broad jokes of the jesters, and the men-at-arms drank themselves stupid at the lower end of the hall.

The Baron Leopold of Unterwalden was already half-drunk himself, and all in honor of a newly-arrived guest, on his way to Kussnacht—the Baron Herman of Schwyz, surnamed Gessler, "the Beater," from his brutality.

Baron Herman had crossed the lake from Altorf that day, with a prisoner on his way to execution, and intended to pursue his journey to Constance ere he delivered over that prisoner to the tender mercies of the Duke of Austria.

Baron Herman sat by Baron Leopold, a big, burly, red-faced man with a resolute jaw and savage aspect, such as was wont to terrify all the peasantry beneath him.

He was telling his entertainer the story of his prisoner, William of Altorf, and how he had trapped that redoubtable archer and poacher.

"You see that I had heard of the dog before, Herr Baron, and knew him for one who had slain the duke's game many a time. The man shoots well, too, as you shall hear. Well, he was the only man in Altorf who refused to do homage to Duke Leopold's cap of maintenance, so I arrested him."

"That was right," observed the other baron, thickly. "What did the villain say to that?"

"Scowled, the impudent dog, and no more. However, I had a notable plan to bring down his pride. I took his son and told the father I would kill both of them if he would not show me how well he could shoot by piercing an apple on the boy's head. You should have seen the fellow turn pale and beg. Ha! that was a notable good jest, Herr Baron. It took all the scowl and fight out of him in a moment. He even offered to bow to the cap if I would let him off."

"Good, good!" cried Unterwalden, in a tone of drunken enthusiasm, as he slapped the table.

"Serve the impudent dog right. What next?"

"Oh, I made him shoot, and, sure enough, he cleft the apple in two, but then he scowled so much that I thought it best to have him in chains along with me, for he is clearly a mal-content and a rebel to his gracious highness, and needs to be punished."

"So he is! So he is! Where is the black-muzzled dog?" asked the host, in a tone of curiosity.

"Oh, he's down in one of your dungeons, I believe. Shall we have him up and make him do something for our sport?"

The Baron of Unterwalden was delighted at the idea.

"Make 'm shoo' 'nath' rapple," he exclaimed, trying to struggle up in his chair, but failing signally. "Bring up r-rascal 'twonce."

Baron Herman signed to one of his attendants, who left the hall, and soon returned, followed by a guard of rough soldiers, leading between them a tall, heavy-built man, with a huge glossy black beard.

This prisoner seemed to be by no means a willing one, for he was heavily ironed, both on hands and feet, and his face wore a savagely defiant scowl that was not pleasant to contemplate. In size he overtopped the biggest of his guards by several inches, and his broad and sinewy frame was the plain index of enormous strength.

"And zasser vill'n," observed the Baron of Unterwalden, with a stare of owl-like wisdom, as the sturdy prisoner was brought up to the dais on which he and his guest were seated. "Whasser name, vill'n?"

The prisoner drew himself up to his full height and looked the drunken noble full in the face with an expression of the bitterest scorn.

"Some call me William the Bold, some Will the Archer, some Will of Altorf. But when I see thee, I wish I had another name."

"And wa's zat?" asked the baron, stupidly.

"William the Hog Killer; for I would I had 'all you Austrian hogs in one," was the savage retort, as the prisoner showed his white teeth under his beard. "I'd kill every hog for fun."

There was something in the tone of concentrated ferocity in which these words were uttered that half-sobered the baron, and he observed to his brother noble:

"A dangerous villain, baron. Needs the ax to stop his tongue."

"We'll try what the sticks will do first," was the reply, with a sneer. "These Swiss hogs have called me the Beater long enough. I'll try to deserve the title. What say ye? Shall we have this fellow taught manners with the rods?"

"Make 'im shoo' nu h' rapple first," interjected Baron Leopold, with a wise look. "Where's ze boy?"

"The little wretch hid himself in the crowd and escaped, I think," was the indifferent reply of Gessler. "We might beat him first and make him shoot afterward, if you please, Herr Baron."

"I am willing to shoot another apple if the gracious baron wishes to see it done," suddenly interposed the prisoner. "If the Baron of Unterwalden will hold the fruit, I will engage to split it with a bolt."

The Baron of Unterwalden looked aghast at the proposal.

"Me hold p' apple! S'pose you miss?"

"In that case, your lordship's hand might be spoiled," answered William of Altorf, shrugging his shoulders with an indifferent air, and the men-at-arms began to laugh at the obvious fact that their lord was being mocked by the sturdy captive.

The baron grew redder than usual as he listened to the titter, and looked fiercely round as if to find who dared to laugh. Before he could fix on an individual, his attention was distracted by the entrance of a gentleman in black carrying a white wand, from the rear of the hall on the dais.

This gentleman advanced, crying with a loud voice:

"Rise all! Room for the most noble Lady Bertha of Unterwalden, Countess in her own right and Lady of Honor to his Imperial Majesty, Lewis of Germany. Room, gentlemen!"

Instantly every one in the hall was on his feet, hat in hand, and looking respectfully toward the door from which the usher had just come. Rough as were the ways and loose the morals of that age, the ameliorating influence of chivalry was at its height in the fourteenth century, and the greatest respect was shown to ladies, at all events ladies of rank.

Through the open door, preceded by several waiting women, advanced a slender, proud-looking young lady, tall and graceful, blue-eyed and blonde, with a haughty profile and a sweet smile—when she chose to use it, which was not often.

Beautiful as an angel the Lady Bertha undoubtedly was, but as proud as Lucifer. One might see that in the expression of her face, the haughty poise of her head, the scornful downward curl of her red lip. Nevertheless she well became her pride and all the bravery of silk and jewels in which she swept to her place on the dais, for she had plenty to be proud of, if riches and beauty are subjects of pride.

Even the drunken Baron of Unterwalden, who was her uncle and guardian, had risen to his feet and stood holding onto his chair and bowing profoundly before the great heiress; and as for Herman Gessler, he was positively stricken dumb by her beauty, and could say nothing as he made his obeisance.

The Lady Bertha acknowledged the courtesy shown her by a slight bend of the head, and took her chair in the uppermost place on the dais before she spoke.

"My Lord Herman of Schwyz is welcome. We heard that he had news from the court, and that there was some trouble among these malapert Switzers. Is it true?"

"That there is trouble among the Switzers—yes, my lady. But I have put all that down with the strong hand, as it should be done. I have their ringleader a prisoner here."

"Indeed?" said the lady, with a languid lift of the eyebrow. "And who is this prisoner?"

"One Will of Altorf, a poacher on the emperor's game. This black-browed scoundrel here is the man."

Lady Bertha turned her gaze on the gigantic Swiss and surveyed him with languid interest, while the captive archer returned the look with a pair of reluctant admiration.

"Is this the man they call Tell, the Daring?" she asked.

"I believe so, madam," was the baron's answer.

"He is a tall fellow and they say a great hunter," she rejoined, musingly. "Bring him hither."

The Swiss was brought up on the dais at the nod of the imperious beauty, who then demanded:

"Hast ever shot a white chamois, hunter? I am told there are none such left."

"The noble lady is wrong. Now and then one is found, but I never knew one to be shot."

Lady Bertha contracted her brows with a pettish expression.

"Always the same story. And I have set my heart on obtaining the beard of a white chamois as a plume for my riding-cap. Dost think thou couldst find me one, wert thou sent free to the mountains?"

The Swiss considered gravely a few moments ere he answered:

"I could try, were I free, but I would not give my word to return to Austrian chains."

The two barons started as he spoke and looked anxiously at the haughty beauty, who seemed to be capable of coolly arranging for the release of the prisoner before their faces.

Gessler had been long hoping for a chance of suing the great heiress for her hand, and thought he saw a way open, so he interposed:

"If the noble lady says the word, I will have the mountains scoured for the white chamois."

"It would be useless," was the rather disdainful reply. "Your men are not mountaineers. And yet, I would give anything, ay, even myself, to the man who should bring me the head of the white chamois that is more rare than diamonds."

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when a bustle was observable at the lower end of the hall, and the usher advanced toward the dais, preceding a tall man with long red hair, who bore a box in his arms.

"An offering for the most noble, the Lady Bertha of Unterwalden from the hunters of the Jungfrau," said the usher.

Then Red Rudiger—for it was none other—advanced, and lifted the lid of the box he carried, disclosing to the delighted view of the lady the head of a white chamois, with pink nostrils, large dark eyes and white transparent horns, the whole beautifully mounted and set on a velvet cushion.

Lady Bertha uttered a cry of joyful surprise as she rose from her chair and eagerly demanded:

"Who sent it? Who took the creature?"

Red Rudiger said nothing, but handed her a small note which she hastily tore open and perused.

Thus ran the note:

"RUDOLPH TO BERTHA: I claim thy promise. I will be beneath thy window in one hour. Fail not thou, for I have done my part as a cavalier."

"SCHONSTEIN."

The lady flushed crimson and hastily thrust the note into her bosom.

"Tell him I will be there," she said in a low tone to Red Rudiger.

The hunter bowed low with a singular expression of face. He seemed as if he wished to say something and dared not. The lady gave him no chance to utter it, however, for she clutched eagerly at her prize and abruptly left the hall on her way to her apartments. As she traversed the corridor she murmured to herself:

"Rudolph of Schönstein, I have thee at my feet at last. Beware!"

It was a singular exclamation under the circumstances.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADDER OF ROPES.

THE Lady Bertha von Unterwalden had gained her chamber, dismissed her maids for the night, locked and secured herself from all intrusion from the body of the castle in her turret, and now sat with her window wide open, the full silver flood of the moonbeams pouring in on the pure white head of the delicate chamois that had so lately roamed the Alps of the Jungfrau in bounding life.

There was more than mere pleasure in the proud gaze which the lady bestowed on this trophy of the chase. True, it was unique and valuable, the only one of its kind in Europe, perhaps the world. Money could not have purchased it, for the boldest and best hunters might have roamed the Alps in vain on its track for years. Such a trophy had never been seen before, and she might safely challenge Europe to match it.

But, besides pleasure and triumph in possession, other feelings were at work in the heart of the Lady Bertha, and they found vent in broken murmurs, now that she was alone.

"Rudolph of Schönstein! Rudolph the Proud! Rudolph, the King of the Tournament! The only man that ever defied my power is at my feet at last. Saints of heaven! That is a man! The knight has turned peasant for love of me, and the King of the Tournament has made himself King of the Alps for my sake. My little white chamois! He brought thee hither for love of me."

She raised and kissed the dumb head as she spoke, and then set it down to gloat over it anew.

Only a year before that day, Bertha von Unterwalden had been crowned Queen of Love and Beauty at a grand tournament at Vienna, where Count Rudolph of Schönstein, the richest noble in the Tyrol, had carried off all the prizes by his unexampled skill with the lance. But, when the proud lady had expected that the knight would have shared the honors of the evening's banquet with her, to her amazement and anger he never came, but disappeared from Vienna that very night, leaving a curt message to the effect that he was "needed at home on urgent affairs."

Bertha had never forgiven this slight, the more cutting that she was used to homage, and had driven many knights to despair by her cruelty and caprice. The insensibility of the Tyrolean cavalier piqued her so much that she made up her mind to capture him at any cost; and made a special *détour* on her way home from Vienna to pass by the Schloss of Schönstein, so as to be given an excuse to demand its hospitality.

The count had indeed entertained her royally at his castle, and she had used her utmost arts to draw him into an avowal of his love, but without avail till the very day of her departure. Then, when the proud Bertha actually bound her scarf on his arm, and charged him, willing or unwilling, to be her knight and true-love, Rudolph had smiled on her—they were alone—taken her in his arms and asked:

"And what would my lady-love that I shall do for her sweet sake?"

Bertha, eager to secure what she thought her triumph, answered:

"Go, bring me the head of a white chamois, and I swear to do whatsoever thou wilt."

"Swear it on the cross and I will do it for thee," was the answer, and the proud girl, humiliated by her overmastering passion, swore it.

She had expected and half hoped that Rudolph would then have indulged in some triumphant caress, but to her surprise he put her away with not so much as one kiss, and bid her farewell before all her train with the most ceremonious courtesy.

From that day to this night she had neither seen nor heard of him, though her thoughts had often dwelt on him. The sudden arrival of the trophy which she had set him to seek merely as a test of her own power, informed her that she had counted aright. Rudolph must love her, however he had striven against it, and this was the proof of his love.

"He is at my feet at last," she said to herself, "and now will I make him my slave, as he has tried to be my master. This once let him think he has the victory. We shall see whether he can leave me after that."

As she spoke, she looked forth from the turret window on the silent landscape, and lo! the moonlight glistened on bright steel. Below the castle stood a man in some sort of armor, looking up to her chamber; and as she looked he waved his arm.

Even at that distance she knew the knightly grace of Rudolph of Schönstein, and waved back her white handkerchief in reply.

Then the knight pointed upward, and she saw that he carried a cross-bow. Quick-witted and reared up in intrigue as were most ladies in those gay times, she understood the gesture and stepped aside.

A moment later the bolt whizzed in at the window and buried itself in the wood-casing so firmly that she could not pull it out; but, as she had expected, there was on it a little ball of silk, which she soon unrolled and let fall from the window, only to draw up a slender cord; then a thicker, and finally a rope-ladder with strong hooks, which she fastened over the stone sill of the window. A moment later the knight was mounting actively upward, and proud Bertha, trembling with a confusion of different feelings, had shrunk into a corner of her room.

The haughty lady had invited a strange man to enter that chamber, and began to realize that she had placed herself in his power. What

if she should prove unable to charm him to her feet, and he should turn out an unworthy knight?

Half inclined for a moment to turn and fly, the next she drew up her slender figure to its full height, as she caught a look of herself in the steel mirror. She remembered all the power of her imperious beauty, and trusted to it to overawe her strange lover. She was one of those spoiled children who love to play with fire, always trusting not to get burned, so long as they have the excitement.

Presently the helmet and plume of an armed man rose over the sill of the window, and Rudolph of Schönstein stood in the room. He cast one quick glance round him and saw Bertha, then turned round to the window, looked out and called:

"Come. We are in good time."

Then, to Bertha's terror and great amazement, the ladder began to shake again, and she realized that more than one man was about to invade her apartments.

Full of alarm and hardly knowing what she did, she was just running to the door of the room, when the count suddenly swooped down on her, caught her in his mailed arms and said in a low, stern tone:

"Hush! Are you mad? Think you to escape now, when you have yielded more than a maid should? Thank the good saints 'twas I, and not another, that came hither to-night."

"Insolence! What mean'st thou?" gasped the lady, trembling. "Why cam'st thou here?"

"Not for love. Let that suffice," was the dry answer. "This castle is needed for the liberty of the cantons, and thou art the woman that shall give it to us."

"I!" gasped Bertha, with pallid face. "I! Help, help!"

She was about to shriek aloud with the instinct of fear, when a second figure sprang in at the casement, and she saw the wild red locks of the tall hunter who had brought her the chamois head!

Like Count Rudolph, he was in armor and bore a naked sword in his hand.

There was something in his grim appearance that attracted Bertha's notice in spite of her terror, and it was with a vague feeling of relief that she cried to him:

"Oh, sir, in mercy do not let them harm me! Keep them back, for the sake of a lady's honor."

To her surprise the red-maned hunter immediately turned, and leaning from the window cried out:

"No more! The ladder is breaking."

Then, with a deliberate motion, the stranger lifted up the hooks and threw the ladder out of the window where it hung by the small cord.

Count Rudolph of Schönstein uttered an angry cry.

"What means this, Red Rudiger?"

The stalwart hunter turned and came up to where Rudolph still held the almost senseless form of Bertha in his arms and said:

"It means that there are enough here to take the castle, and that a lady's honor is as sacred as the freedom of the cantons."

There was something in the air and tone of the rough hunter that compelled respect, and it was with some surprise that Count Rudolph asked:

"Well, what else is there to do? How can we take the castle unless we let in the men?"

"We can open the gates ourselves, and save this lady's name," was the quiet reply.

Count Rudolph stamped his foot impatiently.

"Foolish man, knowest thou not this is the daughter of an Austrian noble? How can we keep her from giving the alarm?"

The ruddy haired hunter's voice trembled ever so little as he answered:

"Because the lady loves thee. Why else art thou here, White Rudolph? But beware! If thou dost wrong to her, I, that am thy sworn comrade, will see her righted."

Count Rudolph of Schönstein hesitated a moment, while the quick brain of Bertha was revolving all sorts of plans as she lay passive in his strong arms and listened to this singular conversation. She did not remember where she had seen this great red-maned lion of a hunter, and yet his face seemed familiar, and she already read his secret with the intuition of an artful woman.

Then said Rudolph:

"Wilt thou then keep her here thyself, while I open the castle gates? See, I trust thee, Red Rudiger, though thou suspectest me."

"I will do it," was the grave reply. "The castle must be taken, but this lady must be safe."

"Very well, then," answered the count. "Remember, comrade, my life is in thy hands. If this lady escapes from thy hands and rouses the castle, the cause of freedom is lost. Take her under thy guard. Farewell."

As he spoke the daring count sheathed his sword, unlocked the door and started boldly out on his quest for the gate of the great castle, full as it was of foes.

The Lady Bertha remained in her chamber alone with Red Rudiger and listened anxiously. The doors were left wide open, and the sounds

of rough and boisterous merriment from the hall below could be heard quite plainly.

Red Rudiger on his part seemed to have forgotten all about his danger and the errand on which he had come, as he stood in the shadow of the room, devouring with his gaze the slender figure of the haughty beauty left in his care.

Bertha was lost in a maze of conflicting feelings. Wounded vanity, the discovery that she had been duped by the audacious count, made her tremble with anger, while her suddenly-acquired knowledge that a revolt against the Austrian authority was on foot filled her with terror.

Reared in luxury, and never having heard a rough word, she had grown up selfish, cruel and ignorant, like a spoiled child. Now all her power seemed to have disappeared in a moment, and she felt that she was only a weak woman after all.

With the sudden revelation of her weakness, however, came the ready resources of deceit and flattery, so tempting to the weak, and ere the steps of the count had died away in the corridor she turned with a sudden access of imploring grace to the red-maned hunter, and, clasping her hands, sobbed out:

"Oh, sir, for the sake of all the holy saints, save me! I am but a weak woman. Can I appeal in vain to a knight to rescue me?"

"I am no knight, lady. I am but a peasant," was the short reply.

"A peasant! Impossible," rejoined the lady, smiling through her tears and coming close to him. Then she clasped both white hands over his arm and continued: "Oh, sir, you are so brave and noble, far worthier of the spurs of knighthood than that cruel and deceitful man who has but now departed from us. You should be a knight, and you shall be, if you will but help me, a distressed lady. Oh, sir, there is nothing I could not find it in my heart to do for the man who would help me this night to escape."

The hunter looked down on her and she could almost see the blaze of his eyes in the darkness.

"Tempt me not," he said, in a low, husky voice. "I know how beautiful you are, but I know the gulf between us is too wide and deep to be crossed by me."

"But not by me," she retorted, with low, cooing tones.

The huge frame of Red Rudiger trembled all over, and then he cast off her arm with a shudder, as he groaned out:

"I am a fool to listen. Why, you have even forgotten who I am!"

"No, no," cried the lady, eagerly, again seizing his arm. "How could I forget your face? I knew you the moment you entered the hall to-night."

"Knew me!" cried the hunter, in a tone of extreme pain, "and yet you never gave me look or word. Me, who carry on my body the scars I gained to save your life! Ah, lady, mock me not. You are a countess; I but a peasant. It is meet the serf should die for his lady; and yet, she should shed one tear over his grave. You have forgotten it all."

For a moment Bertha von Unterwalden was silenced, for the hunter spoke the truth. She had indeed a faint memory of his face, and that was all.

The next moment she started as a thought came across her.

"Is it possible you are the brave man that saved me from the tusk of the wild boar, seven years ago?" she exclaimed.

Red Rudiger made no reply, but drew himself proudly up and looked down on her.

Then she remembered how, when hardly more than a child, she had been hunting in the train of her guardian, and how the charge of a wild boar had scattered the train, while she had been thrown from her horse. The last thing she remembered before she fainted was the huge boar rushing at her and a tall youth with red hair running in between them. From that day to this night she had never seen or heard more of the red-haired youth, whom she had supposed to be one of the baron's retainers.

Now, as she looked up into the hunter's face, her busy brain was weaving plans to make use of his too evident love for her to save herself, and with that thought she began to weep and caress his brawny hands.

"Oh!" she sighed. "To think that all these years they have hidden thy name from me, my brave unknown preserver! And at last I see thee, the man of whom I have dreamed for so many years! Oh, Rudiger, forgive me, forgive me! They bore me away while I was insensible, and told me nothing of how I was rescued. And it was thou indeed that did it?"

"Ay, lady, it was I," was the low answer. "And for my pains, after I had slain the boar, thy kindred left me in the forest to die. I was only a peasant."

Bertha shuddered, and then kissed his hand again.

"Such a peasant were worthy the love of a queen," she said, in her low rich tones.

Poor Rudiger trembled all over at words and caress, and he shook still more as she whispered:

"Save me once more! Save me from the wiles of this false knight, and I will love thee and thou shalt be my knight."

He extricated himself with a sort of sob.

"I cannot, I cannot. I have sworn an oath."

As he spoke they heard a loud uproar in the castle below, shouts, cries and the clash of arms.

The hunter started as he listened, but the lady clung to him in an agony of terror, crying:

"Oh, Rudiger, brave Rudiger, save me from these wretches! They are sacking the castle! Let us fly!"

He went to the window and looked out, where the ladder still swung from the sill by the cord which had drawn it up.

"Will you fly with me, if I take you now?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"I will go anywhere with you," she answered, for she saw that the man worshiped her, and feared nothing.

"Then come," was all he said, as he drew up the ladder again.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASSAULT.

THE Baron von Unterwalden had drank himself under the table at last, and all his men-at-arms were more or less unsteady, when Count Rudolph of Schönstein traversed the corridors of the castle on his way to the great gate.

Unterwalden Schloss was built in the usual fashion of medieval castles in the fourteenth century, a great square donjon, flanked with towers, containing the great hall, the tower door opening into a court surrounded with ramparts flanked again with other towers.

The daring knight found the corridors deserted, the whole of the household being assembled in the hall, and he had no difficulty in issuing on the ramparts from a door on the story above the hall.

Once there he halted in the shadow of the donjon and scanned the battlements keenly. They were to all appearance deserted. The few sentries had retired to their boxes and were snoring away in the peaceful somnolence that suited better a quiet and submissive country than the seething unrest that then marked the Four Forest Cantons.

After a keen glance all around him, Rudolph went boldly forward along the ramparts, passing above the gate, and finding no one awake till he came to the opposite side of the castle. Then he looked down and beheld the sparkle of steel that told where the Confederates lay concealed in the bushes, and he looked over, waving his hand and beckoning to them to come to the gate.

They were quick to take the hint and the knight went back to the gate towers, where he began to descend the stone staircase.

All might have gone well but for one thing. In descending the winding stone steps the armor of Count Rudolph made considerable clanking, increased a hundredfold by the echoes. Before he could reach the ground floor he heard a clash below, as the sleepy warder left his seat in the guard-room, and a moment later heard him call up the stairway:

"Who comes? It's not time for the relief. Go back to your post."

Rudolph made no answer till the call was repeated, and then grumbled out:

"The Herr Baron sent me, old fool. I'm going the rounds."

He heard the warder swear to himself, and a moment later saw the red gleam of the fire in the guard-room shining on that worthy's steel cap and green surcoat.

The warder looked up at him curiously.

"Who in the devil's name art thou?" he asked, suspiciously. "None of our men wear knight's armor."

In truth Rudolph, clad from head to heel in mail, was a very different sight from the usual half-armed retainer of the castle.

"Peace, fool; I am with Baron Herman's train," was the ready answer. "My master made a bet that I should find every one asleep on the ramparts, and so I did. Hold thy peace till I go in, and we'll give them a rare fright."

There was something in the imposing stature and rich armor of the knight that made the warder, used as he was to respect nobility, silent as the other continued:

"Hold thy peace and stay where thou art in thy guard-room. I am in truth the emperor's provost, and there is danger abroad in the land with these malapert Swiss. I am going to give these sentries a fright, to teach them to watch as they should."

The warder gaped as the glittering figure of the knight passed on, until the latter deliberately began to turn the winch that lifted the portcullis and let down the drawbridge with one motion. Then he hurried down.

"Away! What art thou doing?" he cried, angrily. "Dost take me for a fool? Let go that winch!"

"Cease thy prate, fool! I tell thee I am the emperor's provost," answered Rudolph, sternly. "I will but open the gate, and then thou canst ring the bell and rouse the castle."

"Nay, but I'll do that now," cried the war-

der, suddenly grown suspicious as he saw the knight continue at his work, and he was rushing away to the bell-rope when Rudolph let go the winch, ran after him, and with one dextrous trip had him flat on his back on the stone pavement, when the knight drew his dagger and said in a low, stern tone:

"One word and I drive it into thine eye and brain. Dost thou yield?"

The warder was a stout fellow, but he had fallen on his back and his halberd was away in the guard-room. He lay still and said nothing till Rudolph made him rise and ordered him to the winch.

Then he stoutly refused to turn it, and the knight in a fury felled him again to the ground with a blow of his gauntleted hand, set his foot on his neck and began to turn the winch with all his might. Before the drawbridge was half down the warder had recovered his senses, and he struggled up and began to raise a loud alarm, which awakened the whole castle, as he ran away to the bell-room.

Rudolph said no more, but worked away at the winch, unmindful of the hurrying feet and shouts of those approaching. In a few moments he had the portcullis up to the top of the archway and heard the dull boom of the bridge as it struck the stone abutment at the other side of the moat.

Then came a tremendous roar of triumph as thirty-two stout Switzers, in their leather jackets, steel caps, half-armor or no armor, but all big, brawny mountaineers and trained athletes, came bounding over the bridge with their huge two-handed swords, maces and pole-axes, all shouting:

"Liberty! Liberty! Down with the Austrians!"

That cry awoke the castle with a vengeance, as the sleepy sentries rushed out on the ramparts in a panic.

But the Swiss never hesitated. Brawny Max Brugg, wielding a huge mace, rushed up the stone steps on one side of the gate, heading a party of men as big as himself; and Rudolph headed the party that went up the other side.

Before any one had time to organize a connected defense, the ramparts were cleared of defenders, the stalwart Swiss knocking down the half-armed men as if they had been but children with the terrible sweep of their heavy weapons.

Then came a short pause, after which the frightened and half-senseless prisoners were driven into the gate towers like a flock of sheep, and locked up in the ward-rooms, when the Switzers once more raised their cry of triumph and rushed to attack the donjon.

Here, however, they found more than they had bargained for. The occupation of the outer walls of the castle had taken some little time, but just long enough to give the garrison of the donjon time to recover their scattered senses. When the Swiss rushed to their new attack they found the donjon doors closed and barred, and were received by a shower of stones from the battlements above, under which they were fain to desist from their battering at the iron-bound doors, above and below.

Count Rudolph, who had, by the tacit consent of all parties, been looked up to as leader in the assault, stood for a little while completely at a loss what next to do. He knew that his suddenly-raised levy of half-armed peasants, stout and strong as they were, could not hope to succeed in a regular siege of the castle, on account of their small numbers, if nothing else. There were only thirty-three all told, and the daylight could not help revealing what a handful they were, while at least three hundred Austrians were in the castle.

Under these circumstances he bethought him of the rope ladder and Red Rudiger, and at once determined to divide his forces and strive to gain access to the donjon as he had originally intended, by the chamber of Lady Bertha. True, he felt somewhat distrustful of the result, remembering as he did the wiles of Bertha and the suspicious weakness of Red Rudiger, but it was his only chance of success now, and he trusted not to be seen from the donjon while the attention of its defenders was concentrated on the other side of the castle.

Drawing off his men in silence to the gate towers, and leaving only a watch on the donjon, he led a party along the bottom of the dry moat to the place where he expected to find the rope-ladder still hanging by the cord with which it had been drawn up.

To his surprise the ladder itself was in place, and quite firm, having evidently been drawn up again and hooked over the window-sill.

Giving the word to his men to follow him, the knight cautiously ascended the ladder, sword in hand, ready to repel an attack when he should reach the top. He felt suspicious of the unusual quiet, and began to imagine that something had happened to Rudiger, by which he had been overpowered by the castle people. When, however, he reached the top, entered the chamber and found it deserted, he could hardly believe his senses.

It was clear that Red Rudiger, on whom he had counted for so much, had deserted his post. Where he had gone, and what had become of

Bertha, the knight did not stop to ask. He saw that his chance of success was still good, and as soon as he had collected his party in the silent and deserted chamber, he wound his horn from the open window, as a signal to the men at the other side of the castle to renew their assault.

Then, with a rapid rush down through the corridors of the donjon, his men uttering loud shouts of triumph, he burst into the great hall just as the Switzers outside rushed at the doors with their axes.

The effect was immediate and overwhelming. There were only ten Swiss outside and twenty within, but the lights were dim, and the confusion of an attack on both sides magnified their numbers a hundredfold.

The Austrians inside were seized with a wild panic, and rushed to the doors, threw them open and blundered out into the open air, fighting their desperate way through the handful of mountaineers like a mob of mad cattle.

The wary Switzers without gave them free passage, and then joined their comrades to harass their rear; so that inside of twenty minutes thereafter, there were more than three hundred armed men scattered and fleeing through the country outside. Driven like sheep by some thirty Swiss peasants, Baron Herman, the Beater, being among the first to flee, but bearing with him, still in his handcuffs, the black-browed prisoner, William of Altorf.

An hour later, Unterwalden Castle was in flames.

CHAPTER VI.

HILDA.

Up among the Alps of the Rigi, in a little valley nook, stood the large and comfortable chalet of Rudiger Stauff. The cow-bells were ringing all around it, as the cattle grazed on the rich herbage; the green Alps were dotted with sheep and goats, and the swine were grunting contentedly as they lay basking in the pen at the rear of the chalet.

The rough logs of the edifice were neatly squared where they touched each other, and carefully chinked with mortar, while a covering of matched boards, worked into open patterns, concealed the rough wood and gave an air of lightness and elegance to the whole structure. The enormous spread of the projecting roof, supported as it was by large openwork brackets, and the light grace of the exterior gallery that ran all round the upper story of the chalet, contributed to give it an air of picturesqueness that was very captivating to an observer.

Such houses are not unknown in Switzerland to-day, but in the fourteenth century, when decorated Gothic was the ruling mode of building, they were more beautiful than any of our modern and prosaic age.

At the door of this chalet sat a young girl in the picturesque costume of the Forest Cantons, tranquilly working away at her knitting-needles and singing softly to herself. Her long light hair hung down her back in two heavy braids, and her blue bodice and white chemise covered as lovely a rounded bust as ever was seen on a Swiss maiden.

From where she sat she had only to lift her eyes to command the grandest view in Europe, Alp rising over Alp away to the snowy summits of Shreckhorn, Silberhorn and the Jungfrau, towering above a confusion of white peaks that stretched all round the horizon. Below her, at the foot of the green slopes of Rigi, covered with gardens and vineyards, lay the blue waters of Lake Lucerne. The black woods of Unterwalden, dotted with spires of churches and turrets of castles, covered all the opposite shore to the foothills of the Bernese Oberland.

As the young girl looked at these woods in the early morning sunlight, she became aware of a dense column of smoke rising above the trees in the direction of the great castle of Unterwalden, and stayed her song a moment to muse aloud:

"The castle on fire! How strange! It seemed so strong and massive when I saw it last. I wish brother Rudiger were home to tell me about it, but he is ever away now after the chamois of the Jungfrau. I wish he would stay at home, he and that pleasant-spoken stranger they call White Rudolph. I wonder if White Rudolph be in very truth a mere hunter, as he says he is? He shoots well as the best. William of Altorf could not beat him. But his hands are white and soft, and his speech is not like that of Max Brugg or Rudiger. I wish we could see him once more. It is so lonesome here."

The girl ended with a sigh and had turned once more to her knitting when she was interrupted by the clatter of hoofs on the path below the chalet, and speedily recognized the gay riding-cap and robes of a lady of rank coming toward her on a mule accompanied by a man on foot in whom she knew her brother Rudiger.

Being aware that the young hunter was often employed as a guide by the nobles of the vicinity on hunting expeditions, Hilda felt little surprise, though it was not without some curiosity that she rose and prepared to welcome the new-comers.

Red Rudiger led the mule up to the door and then turned to the lady, whom Hilda noticed to be very pale, though extremely beautiful, and said:

"Here, at least, gracious lady, you are safe for a few days, till I can see your kindred at Constance and place you under the shade of the emperor's banner. This is my sister, Hilda Stauff, who will see to your comforts while I am away."

The Lady Bertha looked round her with a weary air, but she gave a little shudder as she answered:

"Of course, if I must be content, I must; but it smells like a stable here. Is there no other place?"

Hilda and Rudiger blushed scarlet, one as deep as the other. Poor, simple creatures, they felt dreadfully ashamed of their poverty at the words of their high-bred visitor. It was not to be denied that the smell of the cattle and goats was quite strong, though the wind blew the odors of the pig-pen to the other side. Swiss chalets, while very picturesque, are generally occupied as stables as well as dwelling-houses, and all are subject to the same little inconvenience.

So our two Swiss felt very much abashed before this delicate lady, and Rudiger stammered out:

"Pardon, gracious lady, but I thought you were too tired to go further; and our rooms are at least clean. If the noble lady desires we will go on, though there is no castle nearer than a day's long travel."

Lady Bertha sighed with an air of resignation.

"No, no, my brave Rudiger; it is not for a hunted fugitive like me to refuse kindness. I am indeed weary and ready to die after my long voyage in that crazy skiff over the rough lake. Take me in, then, but do not leave me, brave Rudiger. What should I do without thee, my preserver, the only one found faithful among all these wicked rebels of Swiss? Do not leave me, Rudiger."

There were tears in the eyes of the haughty beauty as she spoke, for Bertha was indeed wearied out.

After her perilous journey down the rope-ladder, unseen in the first confusion of the assault on the castle, she had followed Rudiger on foot to the lake, and there, embarking in a small skiff, had been rowed across by the hardy hunter to the Rigi shore, where he had seized a mule belonging to one of his comrades, away at the storming of Unterwalden Schloss, and so carried the lady to his home.

He was now so overcome with gratitude at the condescension of his lovely guest that he could only kiss her hand humbly, and stammer out:

"The noble lady knows I would be cut into pieces to serve her. I have saved her once and will do it again."

Then he lifted her from the mule and carried her into the chalet, where he bore her like a child to Hilda's little white chamber on the south side under the eaves, ere he left her to the care of his sister.

As for Hilda, she was completely stricken dumb by the beauty and grace of her visitor, all grandly appareled as she was in Genoa velvets and silks, with jewels such as Hilda had never dreamed of seeing.

Bertha had only had time to seize a riding-cap and mantle ere she made her hurried escape from the castle, and was otherwise dressed as if for a banquet, and it was a curious index of the vanity and frivolity of her disposition that she had insisted on taking with her the little box containing the head of the white chamois, on which she had counted so fondly as a love token from Rudolph of Schönstein.

When she was left alone with Hilda, her first question was for this treasure.

"My box? Where is it? Your brother was carrying it. I must have it. Ask him quickly."

Hilda went down, and Rudiger felt a sharp pang at his heart as he gave up the box he had carried so patiently.

"She cares nothing for me," he thought. "She would rather have a sneer or a stab from Rudolph, who is one of her kind, than to let me waste all my love on her for a smile. But, never mind! Rudolph shall pay for this. Had he loved her I would have said nothing, for a lady may love whom she chooses. But he shall never harm her while I live, any more than the wild boar I killed, and it is an omen that his crest is the wild boar's head. Let the Boar of the Tyrol take care."

This hardy red-maned hunter was in a strange state of mind. He had made up for himself an idol in the Lady Bertha, and now he was alternately ready to kill any one that would not worship this idol, and to hate them if they presumed to come too near it in their adoration. Perfectly humble as to his own claims, he was jealous of all the world, and most of all of the reputation of his idol.

Now, while Hilda returned up-stairs to watch over their guest, he busied himself in stabling the stolen mule and feeding it for its future journey to Constance, and then sat down at the door of the chalet to look back over the waters

of Lake Lucerne and think over what he had done.

By one act he had set a great gulf between himself and all his former companions, and he knew that, should Rudolph choose to expose him to the ire of the Confederates by betraying his counsel, his life would not be worth a moment's purchase.

He knew that the insurrection of the men of the cantons was wide and deep; that it embraced every one he knew, and was certain to succeed. He knew that the flames of Unterwalden Schloss had been the beacon agreed on to rouse the whole country, and that, by this time, every Austrian had probably been chased out of the canton.

Whether Baron Herman, the Beater, had succeeded in escaping with his train to Kussnacht was uncertain; but even there he knew that Austrian power was not safe, and that nowhere, short of Constance and the Tyrol, could an Austrian hope to escape his foes.

And he, Red Rudiger Stauff, had turned Austrian!

He, who had been one of the sworn confederates of Grütli, had fallen away in the very beginning, for the love of an Austrian woman, who would never look on him as aught but an ignorant peasant.

As Rudiger thought over these things his heart grew bitter against himself, and yet he ground his teeth and muttered:

"Let them curse me. I love her!"

Then his eyes roamed over the landscape toward Jungfrau, and he saw that a second column of smoke was rising over the forests of Unterwalden.

"Seelsberg has fallen, too," he exclaimed, aloud. "Thank God for that, for he was a villain. Elsa of Melchthal is avenged."

Then he laughed at himself.

"A pretty fool is Red Rudiger, the Austrian, to rejoice at the fall of an Austrian castle. Thou must learn better the ways of thy new friends, Rudiger."

While he was chewing the cud of his bitter reflections, came the light step of Hilda to his side and she said:

"The beautiful lady is asleep, my brother. Now tell me what has happened, and what are these fires in the woods? Are the Austrian wolves to be hunted at last?"

Hilda was a good patriot, and knew nothing of her brother's change of opinions. She had been taught to hate the Austrians in her dove-like way, ever since they had begun to oppress the people, and she was therefore much surprised when Rudiger snapped out:

"Who told thee to speak ill of the friends of the most noble, the emperor?"

Hilda was too much astonished to reply, and just then her attention was diverted to a horseman coming up toward the chalet.

Rudiger saw it, too, and started.

"My sword, quick—the two-hander, Hilda," he exclaimed. "Here comes the villain that has destroyed my heart's love. It is Rudolph!"

Without heeding her any further, he ran into the chalet, and speedily emerged, carrying his great two-handed sword, just as Rudolph of Schönstein, plumed and mailed, drew rein before the door.

"Avaunt, Tyrolese liar!" cried the red-maned hunter, furiously. "Thou or I dies to-day for the love of Bertha."

CHAPTER VII.

RED RUDIGER'S WRATH.

WITHOUT waiting for an answer, or giving Rudolph any further warning than his first furious defiance, Red Rudiger Stauff rushed at the mail-clad knight, and dealt a sweeping blow at the head of his horse.

Had Rudolph been less expert than he was at all warlike exercises, that day would have been his last; and, even as it was, the mountaineer's blow slew his steed ere he could turn it away with rein and spur.

But, before the Swiss could repeat the blow at its rider, Rudolph was on his feet with shield upraised, and rushing in to close with Red Rudiger.

The hunter, like Rudolph, wore armor, but it was merely a head-piece and breast-plate, while the knight was clothed in complete mail of the best Milan steel, the only remnant of his former fortunes that he had brought with him to the mountains.

This defensive superiority was balanced by the fact that his sword was merely the light stabbing weapon called *estoc*, while Rudiger's huge two-handed sword was fashioned expressly for the purpose of hacking a way into steel-clad men.

To fight at long range against such a weapon was to invite defeat, and Rudolph strove to close and get inside of Rudiger's guard.

But the Swiss was too wary and strong to be easily defeated in this way. Before the knight was fairly free from his fallen horse, a second blow descended with all the power of Red Rudiger's stalwart frame, and though the Tyrolese raised shield and sword to meet it, the blow numbed both arms and beat him staggering back till he fell on one knee, almost overthrown.

Rudiger uttered a fierce shout of triumphant revenge.

"That for the Lady Bertha! Now save thee as thou may'st."

So saying, he whirled up his sword to repeat the blow, when he heard a loud shriek, and the form of his sister Hilda rushed between them, as the girl stood right in front of the knight, to save him.

Poor Hilda had been so much amazed at the whole of this impromptu struggle that she had only been able at first to stand trembling and staring wild-eyed at the two combatants.

She had known Rudolph as the hunter friend of her brother, the handsomest and most gentle-spoken man she had ever seen in all her life. When he had left the Rigi, along with her brother and Max Brugg, a few days before, to hunt chamois on the Jungfrau, they had all been close friends, and now here was a deadly duel in full progress between her brother and the handsome stranger.

Without thinking of the full import of her actions, and only conscious of a wild fear that Rudolph was going to be killed, she rushed between them, threw her arms round the neck of the knight to shield him and screamed out:

"Rudiger, Rudiger, have mercy! He has done no harm!"

Red Rudiger was so transported with the fury that comes of a hot fight that, for a moment, he was nearly striking at his own sister, unconscious of her identity. The next moment, however, he recognized her with a groan of pain, let the point of his sword drop, and stood staring at the two as if paralyzed.

Count Rudolph of Schönstein on his part rose from his knee, and swiftly put the girl behind him, saying:

"Sweet maiden, this is no place for you. Let your brother strike again and slay his comrade if he will. I came but to say one word, and he will not hear me."

Red Rudiger listened like a man in a dream, and then he started and flung up his sword again.

"Get to the house, Hilda," he said, in a hoarse tone. "This man has stained a knight's honor and must die. Get to the house, I say."

"I will not," was the unexpected reply, as gentle Hilda Stauff, usually so meek and quiet, sprung toward her brother, heedless of the gleaming sword. Till that moment she had never known the capacity of her own temper, and now she looked singularly like her wild brother as she stood boldly up before him, answering the red flame of his eyes with the blue fire of her own, saying:

"I will not stir from this spot till I see you in your right mind. Kill me if you please! 'Twill be a noble deed. What has Rudolph done that you should slay him? I say he shall not die, or else I die with him. Do you hear, madman that you are? You must kill us both, if you would kill him."

There was something in the fire and spirit of this young girl, standing undauntedly in front of the terrible warrior, that utterly unmanned him, but it was not admiration or sympathy that made Red Rudiger lower his sword once more.

He rested the weapon on the ground and drew his hand over his brow with a dazed sort of look, as he muttered:

"She too! Are all the women bewitched, and is this White Rudolph a devil who has power over them? She loves him too, and is ready, like the other, to throw me away to save him."

In the mean time Rudolph, who had failed to prevent Hilda from speaking her mind, saw the symptoms of Rudiger's weakening with some relief. Now he tried to speak again.

"Rudiger, old comrade, wilt thou hear me? I came on a good errand for thee."

"Peace!" answered the hunter, in a constrained tone. "I may not strike thee now, but our day will come. Depart from my father's land. I would none of thy words."

"But if not for my sake, then for thine own," pleaded Rudolph. "I tell thee, Rudiger, we have driven the Austrians in one night from every—"

"Silence!" thundered Red Rudiger. "I fight for the Emperor! Dost thou know it?"

Hilda uttered a cry of horror.

"Thou, Rudiger, a traitor!"

As for Rudolph, he said not a word. He had known it, or at least suspected it, ever since he had discovered the flight of Rudiger and Bertha, and he had hidden his old comrade's defection from the rest under a plausible excuse for his absence, before he himself had followed to find him. He had hoped to induce him to return to his duty.

Now the truth was out before a witness, and there was no help for it. His comrade had deserted.

Rudiger, who had shown no sign of sensibility before, turned ghastly pale and then flushed crimson when he heard the unwary exclamation of his sister:

"Thou a traitor!"

"Go to the house!" he said, huskily. "Stand from between us, Hilda."

To his surprise she obeyed him without a word, weeping as if her heart would break, and

Rudiger was left alone opposite to the Tyrolese knight.

Then, when there was no obstacle against continuing the battle, the red-maned hunter hesitated for the first time, and said:

"Go thy ways, White Rudolph. I would not slay thee. I love two women, and both of them hate me and love thee. Tempt me not to slay thee, but go thy ways in peace."

"And may I not say to the men of Grütli that thou art with us as of yore?" asked Rudolph, lingering.

"Tell them I am an Austrian and a spy," was the hard reply. "Let them curse me to their hearts' fill. I go to Constance to meet the emperor and come back with his army to punish the rebels. Away!"

"I do not believe it," retorted the knight, with spirit. "Thou hast met a witch and she has stolen thy senses, but thy heart is with us yet."

Red Rudiger's eyes blazed with a sullen fire as he looked at Rudolph, and he growled out between his shut teeth:

"Beware of whom thou speakest. Thou hast shamefully deceived and outraged a noble lady, and I may avenge her yet."

Rudolph compressed his lips as he looked sadly at the other.

"It is so, indeed. My comrade is bewitched and cannot see the truth, that I love his sister and would make her my wife."

He spoke slowly and distinctly, and his words fell on more than one listener's ears.

Hilda, crouching behind the door in bitter sorrow, heard them, started, flushed scarlet, and then smiled as she looked to Heaven with clasped hands.

Bertha, awakened by the clash of weapons, and leaning on the sill of the upper window under the eaves, heard them, too, and turned crimson with anger, then pale to her lips, as she clinched her teeth and looked down on the two.

Rudiger heard them, and instead of being mollified, was stung to a twofold fury of jealous rage.

"Thou marry Hilda?" he cried, exasperated to the last degree. "Thou, who hast cheated and shamed the noblest and most beautiful lady that ever walked the earth! Wilt thou steal all the love from me, thou white-handed traitor? Guard thyself now, if never!"

So saying, without more ado, he flew at Rudolph with the wild ferocity of a raving maniac, plying him with blow on blow, and driving the warrior back as if he had been a child.

Rudolph was a man skilled in arms, tall, strong and active; but Rudiger had the advantage of him in thirty good pounds of solid bone, muscle and sinew. His huge sword whirled and flashed to and fro in his hands as if it had been but a stick, and the knight found that he had all he could do merely to keep himself from being beaten down bodily.

Backward and to and fro he was forced, till a mighty blow cleft his shield in two and rendered his left arm powerless, and then he missed his footing and fell back over the rocks at the edge of the plateau on which the chalet was built, leaving Red Rudiger alone on the field, a victor.

The stalwart hunter laughed aloud with fierce joy as he saw his foe fall back, and then turned to the chalet without giving a second look over the precipice. Quickly he strode to the door, passed the crouching figure of Hilda without a word, and stalked up to the room where Lady Bertha had been left.

He found the door wide open and the lady coming to meet him with a strange joyful light in her eyes.

"Say nothing, my champion, my knight," she exclaimed. "Thou hast avenged me nobly and thou shalt be rewarded. Come, let us fly, or these dolts of Swiss may come on us, too many to resist."

All the fire had gone out of his eyes now, to be replaced by bashful timidity as he stammered:

"The noble lady is right. We must fly at once. I see more coming from the lake in haste. It grieves me to tire the noble lady, but there is no other way."

She followed him without objection; and when, an hour later, a party of Swiss paused in front of the chalet, they found it empty of humanity. Even Hilda was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BARON'S BRIDAL.

WHEN that same morning dawned, fair and clear, alike over the green top of Rigi and the snowy caps of the Bernese Alps, the Baron of Seelsberg rose from his couch and dressed with unusual care, singing the while. He was in a jolly mood that day, for he had just received word from Arnold of Melchthal, the sturdy Swiss farmer, that he was ready to yield to the honorable baron's wishes, if he would but release his son Anton from prison; and the honorable baron had returned answer to the effect that he was quite ready so to do, as soon as the old farmer came to the castle with the beautiful Elsa, his daughter.

Now the castle was astir with gay life, the re-

tainers dressed in their best, and all was merry as if a wedding were about to take place, as indeed it was; for the baron was always scrupulous to invoke the sanction of the church on his many unions, and it was by the simple process of getting rid of one wife as soon as he got tired of her and marrying another that he changed his partners to suit his own whims. Sometimes they died of some illness, at other times they were killed in a hunt by a convenient wild boar, or fell down a precipice, or were drowned in a lake storm. One after the other, to the number of six, like the wives of the lamented Blue Beard—a French noble of that same century—the wives of the Baron of Seelsberg had vanished, and now he was to take to his bosom a seventh, the beautiful Elsa, daughter of Arnold of Melchthal.

There had been some little trouble in overcoming the objections of Arnold to the match, and the baron had been compelled, much against his will as a gentleman, to seize the lady's brother, clap him in prison and threaten to hang him, ere the old man gave his consent.

Now, however, all was settled, and the baron had donned his best suit in honor of the occasion; for Arnold had sent him word that he would bring the bride that morning.

The baron was right merry as he cracked his jokes at breakfast, and as soon as that meal was over he sent for young Anton Melchthal, and had him brought before him, all chained as he was.

"Well, young man," began the baron, puffing with importance, "it seems that all the Swiss are not such fools as thee and that friend of thine, whom my men are now hunting. Thy father hath sent me word that he will bring the pretty Elsa here to-day. Since we are to be brothers-in-law for awhile, let us be friends. What sayest thou?"

The young Swiss—he was but a boy—looked quietly up at the baron and answered calmly:

"Were my father of my mind, he would have let me hang. Better a dead son than a daughter defiled."

The baron laughed, then replied:

"Ah, well, thou art young yet. Go to the buttery and tell them to stuff thee well in honor of thy sister's promotion to be mistress of the castle."

"Is this to be my wedding garment?" asked the boy, stretching out his manacled arms.

The baron laughed again.

"That's the joke of the whole thing, lad. The Baron of Seelsberg loves to do things as no one else does them. Yes, that must be thy wedding garment till I have the pretty Elsa safe and sound in the castle. Take him away, Karl."

The warder obeyed his master's nod, for the baron was tired of his joke; and he took the boy away to the buttery, ironed as he was.

The young Swiss, however, refused to eat anything, and seemed to be sunk in gloom as he waited for the sound of voices which should tell him that his sister had arrived at the castle.

Meantime, the baron went out on the steps of the castle to survey the hamlet below the gates, and ordered the bells to be set going in honor of the coming of the bride, while the gates were thrown wide open to admit the train of expected feasters.

He was pleased to find that the court-yard was already full of villagers in their holiday clothes, wearing loose white smock-frocks trimmed with blue braid, and all carrying huge nosebags. A great many carried their floral tastes to such an extent that they had dressed up large heavy poles with blossoms, crowned with posies that looked like small stacks of hay.

As soon as the baron appeared they greeted him with uproarious shouts, and the Austrian noble bowed and smiled with great affability, for it was an unusual thing for him to be cheered by his tenants.

As a rule, they had heretofore hated and feared him, but to-day they seemed to be overflowing with joy and affection.

Then the village bells began to ring, and presently up the road came a little train of peasants on foot, carrying the same huge stacks of flowers, and headed by the bent but still powerful form of old Arnold of Melchthal.

The baron uttered an exclamation of great joy, for beside Arnold was another person he knew well. The fair head crowned with white flowers and a silver veil, the trim and elastic figure in its picturesque Swiss costume, the lofty carriage of the whole person, and the bounding grace of the step could belong to none but Elsa of Melchthal, the belle of Unterwalden Canton.

The proud noble could hardly restrain himself till the train had entered the castle gate, and then he rushed forward to embrace Elsa, crying: "All hail, my pretty dove! Hast thou come at last?"

He had almost reached the girl, and his arms were still outstretched, when old Arnold turned on him with a loud shout.

"Now! STRIKE FOR LIBERTY!"

In a moment a bright blade gleamed in the old man's hand, and he had grasped the proud baron by the throat with a gripe like steel. In the same instant the smock-frocks fell from the

shoulders of the peasants, the flowers from the poles which they had concealed, and three hundred armed Switzers, with their huge maces and pole-axes, stood within Seelsberg Schloss, its masters!

The retainers were too much taken by surprise to offer any resistance, and in a twinkling the triumphant Switzers had driven them out of the castle with kicks and blows of the butt-ends of their weapons, while a dozen huge farmers, with their heavy cart-whips, were thrashing the proud baron of Seelsberg all round his own court.

The baron fought hard at first and swore furiously, but the whips soon tamed his courage as they lashed him with all the force of stalwart arms. His curses changed to howls, his howls to shrill yells of agony, as he ran round the court, and finally out at the gate of the castle, still pursued by the vengeful Swiss, till they had driven him to the edge of the bank over Lake Lucerne.

Maddened with the pain, and only anxious to escape somehow from those terrible whips, the baron made a great leap into the lake, forty feet below, and disappeared with a loud splash.

Then his tormentors turned away to the castle, laughing fiercely in triumph, and found the place already in flames, while the peasantry of Seelsberg were sacking it of everything valuable.

Not much time was wasted over it, however; for Max Brugg, who had led the assault beside old Arnold of Melchthal, was anxious to hear news of his old comrade, Red Rudiger, of whom Rudolph had, as he knew, gone in search.

He only took time to see the place thoroughly cleared of all armed Austrians, when he and his comrades embarked on the lake for the Rigi, according to a previous agreement with Rudolph.

As they put off they saw the poor baron of Seelsberg, dripping and alone, crawling on shore to the village, where now he was but a powerless outcast.

CHAPTER IX.

A KNIGHTLY FOE.

WHEN Max Brugg and his comrades arrived in front of the chalet of Rudiger, they found it empty and apparently deserted by its owners. The door was closed but not locked, the cattle were wandering unheeded over the pastures by the house, and there was no sign of the presence of human beings in the vicinity.

Honest Max, who had come up there simply because Rudolph, the master-spirit of the revolt, had told him, was completely puzzled. He and his comrades had noticed the sudden disappearance of Rudiger on the previous night, but Rudolph had quieted their suspicions by telling them that the red hunter had departed on business urgent to them all, and it was certain that he had left behind the rope-ladder by whose aid they had taken the castle of Unterwalden, almost without bloodshed.

Why they were instructed to follow Rudolph to the Rigi after the effectual surprise of Seelsberg no one knew, but they were too well pleased with the success of their work so far to hesitate in obeying Rudolph's further orders. The fair-haired Tyrolean had led them to an easy victory and the country was roused through all the Canton of Unterwalden, while the last news that they had of Baron Herman, the Beater, was that he had crossed the lake with the remnant of his train on the way to Kussnacht, and that the Austrians were leaving their posts in haste and fleeing to Constance.

True, Schwyz and Uri were yet nominally in Austrian possession, and William of Altorf was a prisoner as far as they knew, but having done so much they expected soon to be able to do more, and to drive the tyrants beyond Lake Zug to Constance and the Tyrol, ere they rested from their labors.

But what could Rudolph have meant by telling them to come to Rigi?

This was what puzzled honest Max more and more as he looked round the chalet and found no one. There were no castles and no Austrians on the Rigi, the country being sparsely settled from thence all the way to the city of Constance. The only place of importance between the two was the walled town of Appenzell, which every one knew to be still faithful to the emperor.

"There is nothing here. Rudiger must have gone to rouse the people of Kussnacht against the Gessler," suggested young Anton of Melchthal, who had joined the party. "Let us go thither and help them. There is no one here."

"Not so," responded Black Max, firmly. "Rudolph never made a mistake since I knew him. He sent us hither and he must be here. Let us search the place before we leave."

They rummaged over the house without effect, and then proceeded to search the neighborhood. Black Max was the foremost of the explorers, and his face wore a gloom not often seen there, for he was usually a merry fellow. He was puzzled and alarmed at the silence of the place, and especially at the absence of Hilda; for Black Max was considerably smitten with the charms of that damsel, and had been only too willing to come to the Rigi, in the hope of exchanging a few words with her. True, she had never

shown him any special marks of favor, but Max was one of those bold merry spirits who are not wont to waste much trembling over love affairs, and he knew he had the ear of Red Rudiger, her brother, which counted for much with an orphan maiden.

Presently, as the men were scattered over the Alps near by, calling to each other in the shrill tones of the Alpine hail, the dark-faced young hunter fancied he heard a faint cry in the voice of a woman, from somewhere down in the valley beneath the chalet.

His trained ear caught the sound and located it with the instinct of a mountain hunter, and he instantly exerted his own powerful lungs in the warning cry to his comrades to listen.

The call was heard and understood and silence reigned over the Alps around them for nearly a minute, at the end of which time the faint cry he had heard was repeated, away below them all.

Max Brugg rushed to the edge of the plateau on which stood the chalet. It was the side away from Lake Lucerne, for they were on the Rigi Kulm, the highest point of the green mountain, which on the north descends in a succession of steep slopes and sheer precipices to Lake Zug.

Full of fears for his friend, Max looked down, and beheld, far below him, something white, blue and red that fluttered in the wind on a shelf at the edge of a precipice. It was several hundred feet away, but he could see that it was the garments of a Swiss woman, who was on her knees by the body of a man in armor.

Max Brugg gave but one look, recognized Hilda and Rudolph, and then put all his strength into the "discovery hail" of the searcher who has found the lost traveler in the snow.

Then he waved his hand and pointed downward as a signal to his comrades where to join him, and immediately plunged down the declivity toward Lake Zug.

The descent on this side was at first a perpendicular bank of some fifteen feet followed by a steep slope covered with gorse and bushes, and then it fell away in a succession of abrupt drops and slopes, till it jutted out in a sort of ledge about twenty feet broad, at the brink of a sheer precipice of eight hundred feet, before it reached the shores of Lake Zug strewn with rocks and boulders.

To a trained mountaineer like Black Max, unincumbered with any defensive armor beyond a steel cap and leathern jacket, covered with iron scales, the descent offered little difficulty, though to a tyro it looked sufficiently formidable. A drop of fifteen feet to an active gymnast, landing on a soft slope, is no very serious matter, taken the right way; and Max knew just how to take it, facing the wall, letting himself down with hands and hooked alpenstock for nearly half the distance, and dropping the remainder on bent and elastic toes and knees.

From thence down the many slopes and drops he scrambled in safety, till he stood on the ledge where Hilda was kneeling, and exclaimed:

"Oh, Hilda, how happened this?"

Poor Hilda looked up at him with pale, tearless face.

"Oh, Max, is it thou at last? He is dead! He is gone! He will never smile again!"

Something in her face made Max look very grave as he turned his eyes alternately from her to Rudolph and back again. Stout-hearted as he was in love affairs, that look and those words revealed to him in a moment that Hilda was crazy with grief for the loss of Rudolph, and thought no more of honest Max Brugg than of a favorite sheep dog.

The knowledge was not flattering to his vanity, of which Max had his full share, but his conduct at once did credit to his heart and friendship, for he had loved and trusted White Rudolph with all the fervor of a soldier to a favorite leader.

"We do not know he is dead yet, Hilda," he said, gently. "Let me feel if he is yet warm."

"I cannot undo his armor," she replied, with a look of weariness and pain, "and it is killing him, this stiff, hard steel."

"Let me try," he answered.

Then he knelt down and with skillful fingers undid the knight's beaver and loosed the lacings of his gorget.

The face of the fallen man was white and still, but it was impossible to feel his heart on account of the heavy cuirass that covered his body. Max put his finger on Rudolph's temple, and could just feel a faint flutter of the pulse in the temporal artery, wherefore he turned to Hilda with the remark:

"He is not dead, but only stunned. How came he here, trying to climb this place in his clumsy armor? Is the man mad?"

Hilda, before so pale, flushed crimson at the question and hid her face in her hands.

"Do not ask me," she faltered. "He was fighting, and was beaten over the precipice by a misstep. Ask me no more, I do beseech thee, Max."

The honest hunter said no more, for at that moment his comrades began to descend the cliffs, and were soon crowding round. With the foresight of old mountaineers, and knowing

that an accident had happened, they had stopped at the chalet on the way and provided themselves with the long ropes that are so useful in Alpine climbing.

The insensible knight was unarmed where he lay, and a careful search revealed the fact that none of his bones were broken. If his armor had done him no other service, it had saved him from many a hard knock of projecting rocks, as he rolled and tumbled, already stunned by Red Rudiger's last blow, down precipice and slope to the ledge where Hilda had found him when she crept forth from the house, after Rudiger's departure, almost ready to pray for death in her loneliness and desolation.

They found his heart still beating feebly, and as soon as his heavy arms were removed he began to breathe more freely, till his eyes opened and he sat up in a dazed and bewildered way, staring at his friends.

"What is the matter? How—"

Then he stopped, looked all round him and became silent. In that moment he saw Hilda and remembered all.

"How cam'st thou to fall down here, White Rudolph?" asked one of the bluff Swiss, as he paused.

Rudolph rubbed his forehead and seemed trying to remember.

"I was fighting an Austrian," he said, slowly. "He got the best of me, and here I am."

"But where was Rudiger?" asked Max Brugg.

"I do not know."

The knight cast his eyes down as he said this. He could not look a man in the face and lie, even to save Hilda's brother.

"But where is the Austrian?" persisted Max.

"Ah, thank God, he has fled," was the fervent ejaculation of Hilda, and the girl burst out crying.

Her tears had a strong effect on Rudolph of Schönstein. All his weakness and confusion of mind seemed to vanish, and he rose to his feet with the assistance of a bystander, when he stood swaying to and fro.

Then he spoke out, strong and clear:

"I call all here to witness that I came to this pass by a mishap in fair fight from an honorable enemy. You have asked where is Rudiger Stauff. I will tell you now, for now I remember. He has gone to the city of Constance with an Austrian lady, to place her in safety; and I, Rudolph the Hunter, pledge my word to you that Rudiger Stauff is true to the liberty of the cantons. Believe nothing you hear against him, for I tell you that Rudiger at Constance, knowing all the plans of our foes, will do us more good than Rudiger here among us. Comrades, do you trust me and him?"

"We trust you both," was the grave reply of Max Brugg, "but who shall insure Red Rudiger's faith under Austrian temptation?"

"I will answer for it," replied Rudolph. "Wait and see."

CHAPTER X.

THE BEATER BEATEN.

WHEN Red Rudiger left the chalet, escorting the lady Bertha, he was equipped for a long journey in the midst of perils. Over his shoulder he had slung his trusty cross-bow, with an ample store of bolts therefor; and he carried at his side a large wallet full of provisions, for he knew that the country through which he was to pass had but few resources.

Two ways were open to him by which to reach Constance, where he knew that the new emperor was gathering his armies. One, the most direct, was straight across the country to the south of Lakes Zug and Egeri, by way of Glarus and Appenzell. By this road he would have to traverse the revolted section as far as Glarus; but after that, would reach the Austrian canton of Appenzell, as yet faithful to the emperor. The other way lay to the north, round the head of Lake Zug, through Zurich; and the first place that he would come to was Kussnacht, where stood the castle of Baron Herman Gessler.

A look at his delicate charge was enough to determine him to take the latter course. He saw that the daintily-reared lady was not fit to undergo a long journey, and he knew that in Kussnacht he would meet with her friends in all probability.

Yet it was with a strange feeling of gloom and depression that the stalwart hunter set out on his long journey. He was guarding the lady whom he loved better than his life—she was absolutely in his power, and dependent on him for everything. He felt that he had a right to be happy when she smiled on him and called him her "champion and preserver;" when she told him, as she did more than once, that "such a hero was worthy to be a knight, and to win the love of a queen."

The gloomy face of Red Rudiger would lighten up at these words, and he would softly kiss the hand she extended to him, as he sturdily trudged on by the side of her mule. But, for all that, the nearer he came to Kussnacht, the deeper became his gloom.

"What ails my brave preserver?" at last inquired the lady, as they came nearer the hollow way that led to Gessler's castle on the hill above Kussnacht.

The day was long past noon, then, and the slanting rays of the sun shone on their backs as they entered the hollow way.

"We are near a place of safety, now," continued the lady; "for Baron Herman's train must have escaped, and he always boasted that his castle was impregnable."

"And do you wish to place yourself under his protection?" demanded Red Rudiger in the same gloomy way, as he trudged along with his eyes on the ground.

The lady looked round her and hesitated a little, ere she rejoined:

"No. I shall never feel safe in this country again. I would much rather be in Constance. But we can go on with the baron's train and be safer. He will have tents, and we can travel faster. You, my noble Rudiger, instead of treading the dust like a peasant, should bestride a horse as a knight, till the emperor deal thee the blow which shall make thee a noble."

Rudiger looked up quickly, his countenance all aflame with passionate eagerness.

"Oh, noble lady," he faltered, "do not mock me. Is there indeed a chance for me to pass the deep barrier that parts noble from serf?"

"Nay, not a chance, but a certainty," she answered, brightly, and letting her little white hand drop as if unconsciously, on his auburn mane. "I am a near relative of Frederick of Austria, and when he shall learn that thou hast saved his kinswoman at the peril of thine own life, I'll dare be sworn he will refuse thee and me nothing."

"Thee and me!"

The words, the intoxicating association of the two names by the lips he loved, made the brain of Red Rudiger swim with a feeling of ecstasy for a moment, and then he threw up his head, squared his shoulders, and stepped out like a new man.

Bertha watched him with a faint smile of pride at her complete empire over this giant, who had overcome the best knight of the Vienna tournament, and thus they went on till they reached the summit of the hollow way, and looked down on the little hamlet of Kussnacht at the head of the bay.

To their right frowned the gray towers of Gessler's castle, but the gates were wide open and the place deserted, to all seeming.

When Rudiger noticed this, he smiled like one well pleased, and hurriedly remarked:

"The gracious lady sees it would not be safe to stop at the baron's castle. The Beater is away at some of his accursed work, and the people are reused throughout the country. We must go on."

Hardly had he spoken, when a powerful voice hailed them from the top of a rock at the side of the hollow way.

"How now, Rudiger Stauff? Where away? The Beater comes, and all true Swiss should stay to meet him, and give him back the blood he has made us drink."

Rudiger looked up and beheld the gigantic form of William of Altorf, cross-bow in hand, standing on the top of the rock, his glossy black beard waving in the wind.

"What dost thou there?" asked the hunter, surprised. "I saw thee last a prisoner in Gessler's hands."

William of Altorf laughed a scornful and bitter laugh.

"Yes, they kept me fast when the rest of you were rattling the old Schloss about their ears. But I was too much for them, old friend. They carried me over the lake and I threw myself in the water, all ironed as I was, and got safe to shore in spite of them. Now it is my turn, Rudiger Stauff. The Beater shall see me cleave another apple this time, but it shall be the apple of his eye. Look behind thee where he comes!"

Rudiger started and looked round.

There, at the foot of the hollow way, rose a great cloud of dust, through which the gleam of arms showed that horsemen were trotting along, and in front of all the red banner of Gessler towered above the dust, beside the black eagle of Unterwalden Schloss.

Bertha uttered a little cry of joy as she recognized the colors of her own people, and she whispered eagerly:

"Quick; let us go to them, Rudiger, and tell them that this wicked man is waiting for them."

"No, no, 't would not be safe," was the whispered answer. "William of Altorf would never let us get there. He would shoot ere I could bend my bow. Let us get back out of his way. Who cares for this Austrian brute? God save the emperor! Let Gessler die, and let the emperor send better men to rule here."

Uttering this enigmatic opinion, the hunter led forward the mule, unheeding the fact that William of Altorf had disappeared from the rock above them.

In a few minutes they were safe behind the rocks, where they could command a view of the summit of the hollow way, and there Rudiger Stauff halted and looked back with grim eagerness for the tragedy he knew to be coming.

Bertha, frightened at she knew not what, sat on her mule, shuddering, but Rudiger was full of joy.

"Yes, I am an Austrian now," he kept muttering to himself with a kind of fierce self-contempt. "An Austrian spy! But down with this Gessler, for all that! Ah, hurrah! How now, my haughty one?"

As he spoke, the powdering dust rose in a cloud in the air as Gessler and the Baron of Unterwalden, riding side by side, came in sight, their horses white with foam, as if they had been ridden hard, under the rock where William of Altorf lay concealed.

They saw the gigantic hunter rise up and stalk to the front of the rock, and heard his thundering voice shout:

"Halt, Herman the Beater, and look on me."

There was a confusion in the head of the column as Gessler pulled up his horse in surprise and looked at the archer of Altorf.

Then came the thundering voice again:

"Herman the Beater, I cleft one apple for thy pleasure. Now I cleave the apple of thine eye."

They saw the white flash of the steel quarrel in the sunlight, and then Gessler threw up his arms and dropped from his saddle, shot through the right eye into the brain, amid a confusion of clamor and outcries.

Red Rudiger stamped his foot with a cry of savage joy.

"At last the Beater gets his deserts!" he said.

"Now, William of Altorf, stir thee, or thou art lost."

Bertha had turned deadly pale as she saw the fall of the knight and heard Rudiger's unwary exclamation.

"Oh, Rudiger," she faltered, "art thou, too, false to me? Have I no friends left, not even thee?"

Then the rough hunter turned and saw that his beautiful charge was pale and weeping; and all his feelings suffered a revulsion.

"Betray you! False to you!" he cried, fervently. "No, no, sweetest lady, if I fail to take thee safe to thy friends, let me be cut into small pieces. But bethink you, 'twas but last night I was a Swiss. Give me time to wear the coat I have turned a little more easily. Gessler is down, but the emperor lives."

Then they both looked back at the rock, and lo! William of Altorf had disappeared, and the Baron of Unterwalden, with his train, were all in a confusion of panic round the body of the slain Gessler.

Red Rudiger looked, and a terrible struggle seemed to agitate his mind as he clutched with an iron gripe the rein of Bertha's mule. The lady watched him closely, and presently faltered in her most plaintive tones:

"Rudiger, my knightly hero, be brave and generous, as thou wert wont to be. Save thy Bertha."

His face relaxed its tension; he shook all over as if with ague, and then he turned his countenance to her and said in a low, hoarse voice:

"Oh, lady, for thee I would face all the torments of hell. Let us come. I am a traitor to my friends but true to thee. I obey."

Then he led out the mule and marched straight toward the Austrian train.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FLIGHT TO ZURICH.

THE appearance of Red Rudiger, leading the mule, was almost the signal for a fresh stampede among the Austrians around the Baron of Unterwalden.

They had suffered so much from the panic produced by the Swiss uprising and the simultaneous capture of their vaunted strongholds that they feared an enemy in every bush.

True, the Swiss had taken no lives save that of Gessler just slain, but the crowd of demoralized fugitives from the emperor's castles had scattered all over the country, deprived of their arms, driven like cattle with blows and curses by the stalwart Switzers, and all the courage seemed to have been knocked out of them.

The Baron of Unterwalden, who had dismounted from his horse to examine the body of the dead Gessler, clambered up again in a hurry, yelling out:

"Mount!"

The affrighted retainers were all ready to gallop back down the pass when it occurred to them that the Swiss probably were coming that way, and so they halted and swayed to and fro in dire tribulation before the advent of a single man, till Rudiger called out to them in tones of intense scorn:

"What fear ye? I am for the emperor. Come along."

Then the Baron of Unterwalden turned his horse again and took courage when he saw his ward Bertha.

The panic stricken retainers were also reassured when they recognized the flutter of their lady's robe, and pretty soon surrounded the pair, eagerly asking all sorts of questions.

It seemed rather odd, but it was nevertheless true, that not one of them seemed to think of following after William of Altorf to avenge the death of Gessler. They were too thoroughly panic-stricken for that.

Rudiger noticed it and asked in his fierce, contemptuous way:

"Why do ye not chase the man that shot

your master? He is alone, and there is not an armed man in the country to-day save myself."

The Baron of Unterwalden shuddered as he looked round.

"Not for your lives let a man stir," he exclaimed. "The night is coming on apace and no one knows where that villain has his friends hidden. We must push on to Zurich as fast as we can. There we shall be safe for it is a walled town and the emperor's troops yet hold it, while the main army is at Constance. Who knows the road to Zurich?"

There was an embarrassed buzz among the men-at-arms, each asking the other if he knew and all replying in the negative till the baron turned to Rudiger.

"Dost thou know the way, good fellow?" he asked. "If thou dost, I'll pay thee an hundred marks as soon as we draw rein inside the gates of the town."

The baron was unwontedly polite in his manner for he was badly scared, but for all that there was a tone of patronage, as from noble to serf, in his voice as he made the offer.

Bertha, who began to feel safer since she saw her kinsman's train around her, glanced furtively at Rudiger to see how he took it, and saw the crimson flush mounting to his brow already, while a proud and angry answer trembled on his lips, at the offer of money.

Before he could utter it, the lady, quick-witted as ever, and feeling that on the courage and coolness of her late preserver she must still depend for some time till safe in Zurich, interposed:

"My cousin, what mean you? This gentleman is in disguise, but he needs no pay to succor a lady. Give him a horse quickly, for we must ride on apace. I will tell you all about him, by and by."

This was said with a meaning look over the unconscious head of Rudiger, which the baron, who was used to his ward's imperious ways, received and obeyed instantly.

"I crave the gentleman's pardon," he said, "but his disguise is very perfect. Here, some of you, bring up Baron Herman's charger. Poor fellow! He will need it no more. And then, sir, if it please you, we are ready to follow your lead."

Red Rudiger bowed in silence and stalked over to where a man was leading up Gessler's charger, all caparisoned for war as it was, with its deep military saddle, where pommel and cantle rose up before and behind for some fifteen inches from the horse's back.

He went proudly enough in all outward appearance, but for the first time in his life an ominous quaking had seized his heart. The fact was that Rudiger, bred to the mountains and at home among crags and chasms, had never crossed a horse in his life before, and had only ridden mules up a beaten track once or twice, never beyond a trot.

However, the deep war-saddle was of itself almost enough to keep any man in his seat, and Red Rudiger solemnly mounted and rode slowly out to head the party that was now waiting anxiously for his guidance.

"It is no use to ride fast," he observed, as they took the road for Zurich. "The way is rough and long, and we can go faster as soon as night comes on. You have marked your track for miles with the dust you have made by trotting."

So saying he led the way at a brisk walk; and Lady Bertha, obedient to his silent look, rode up beside him as they moved away. He was no fool, this big Swiss, if he had never ridden a horse before; and the lady, who had almost doubted the success of her own experiment at deceiving the baron as to Rudiger's antecedents, began to feel a thrill of new-born admiration in her heart as she surveyed his stalwart figure sitting up in the deep saddle as if he had been used to it all his life, though she knew differently.

The fact was that Bertha was cogitating in her vain and fickle mind all sorts of schemes for the future, of which the most prominent was some way to revenge herself and restore her reputation as a beauty, blemished as it was by the way in which Rudolph of Schönstein had treated her.

She knew that the count was not dead. So much Rudiger had told her, for he was too familiar with the country to believe that Rudolph had fallen any great distance down the steep northern slope of the Rigi Kulm.

Being, as she had said, a relative of the emperor, she was revolving a scheme in her head, by which Rudiger might be really made noble, and by which he might be given the confiscated title and lands of the absent Rudolph of Schönstein. To obtain this boon, it was necessary to prove Rudiger of noble blood in some way; and she had noticed that he was very like in form and feature to the count, while she knew that her cousin, the Baron of Unterwalden, had no idea of the identity of Rudiger as a peasant of the Rigi.

If he were equally unknown to the men-at-arms in the train, she had made up her mind that a terrible warrior, such as she knew Rudiger to be, might prove a most acceptable hus-

band in the stormy times that seemed to be coming.

At the same time the cunning creature was perfectly prepared to throw over the mountaineer as soon as she arrived in safety at the camp of the Austrians, should she find it impossible, or even difficult, to carry on the deception and turn him into a fully-fledged gentleman.

In those times, it must be remembered, education was so limited that many nobles made their mark in signing documents, few could read, and the stamp of a gentleman was expertness in the use of all arms.

In many of these she knew her stalwart champion to be proficient, but she trembled for him when it came to the grand test, the use of a lance on horseback.

Contrary to her expectations, Red Rudiger behaved as if he had been a knight all his life. He had a great deal of pride and self-control; he knew his own deficiencies, and from the moment that the lady had thrown in his way the tempting bait of possible nobility in the future, by union with her, he bent all his energies to the task of hiding his shortcomings.

It was nearly sunset when they started on the way to Zurich, and he maintained a walking pace till the evening closed in, and with it the clouds and darkness of a storm which he knew to be coming, from the infallible barometer of that district, the top of Mount Pilate.

When clouds hang around the summit of this mountain the Switzer knows they will stay there, and the day be clear in other quarters; but when old Pilate shows his head plainly, and the chasm where Pontius Pilate is supposed to have slain himself, then a storm is coming.

Sure enough, it came as the sun set, and with it came the opportunity Rudiger had desired, a period of darkness wherein he could venture to ride faster without exposing his bad riding to the critical eyes of the men-at-arms.

As soon as it was quite dark he gave the word to ride faster, and so they swept on through the night, while Rudiger was taking his first lesson in the noble art of horsemanship, all alone.

He was a man of quick perception, athletic frame, and learned quickly. Before the morning dawned he felt more at home in the saddle, though stiff and sore, and he had the consolation of knowing that none of his companions were very expert in the saddle, most of them being, like himself, more used to foot-work.

But that night was a sore trial to the rest of the party, and above all to poor Lady Bertha, protected as she was by cloaks and coverings such as they could improvise. The pitiless rain came pouring down, the road became deeper every moment, and though it was but some twenty miles in a straight line from Küssnacht to the city of Zurich, it was daylight, all gray and half hidden by the falling sheets of rain, before they sighted the towers of the Gross Münster or Cathedral of that place. Then when Rudiger looked round him at his weary and muddy party he smiled proudly to himself as he saw that no one was in any condition to criticise him. All were too miserable and he was the strongest and best of the party.

They rode on to the city and soon came on the hill which commands a full view, when Bertha uttered a fervent cry of thankfulness.

There in the valley, all round the city, on either bank of the green and rapid Limmat, was a perfect city of tents and pavilions, while long lines of tethered horses showed the presence of an army and the smoke of innumerable campfires half hid the outlines of the walls of the town.

The Baron of Unterwalden, who had been sitting crouched in his saddle in an attitude of helpless despondency, dripping wet, cold and hungry, now straightened up and echoed the cry of joy.

"The emperor is nearer than we thought," he observed. "He has passed Constance. We shall punish these rebellious dogs before we are many days over, eh, Sir Rudiger?"

Red Rudiger drew himself up as he heard for the first time his knightly title, and answered:

"Yes, the emperor is here, or, if not, there are enough men to fight if they are handled well."

"Handled well!" echoed the baron, scornfully. "These peasants can never resist the shock of the knights of the empire. We will sweep them away like chaff before the storm."

Rudiger smiled in a grim kind of fashion.

"They took the castles from the knights of the empire without much work, peasants though they be."

The baron turned red as he retorted:

"That was a surprise when we were un-awares. Any one may be beaten that way. See myself and my men. We had not even time to put on our armor. It will be different in a fair field."

Rudiger said no more. He was too keen not to know that he must play his part as an Austrian well if he hoped, as he began to do, to win the Lady Bertha, and yet his real sympathies with his old comrades would crop out in spite of him and compel him to resent a sneer at them.

Bertha was too miserable and exhausted after her terrible journey to warn him, as she would have done had she noticed anything, and so they rode into the emperor's camp, the Baron of Unterwalden chafing at the suggestion implied by the words of his late guide, with a new-born suspicion against him waking in his heart.

Rudiger noticed, with a smile of some disdain, that there were no guards or outposts around the camp.

The Austrians, secure in their numbers and splendid array, seemed to be buried in an apathy as deep as that which had enveloped the castles of the Forest Cantons before the rising.

Their little train of dripping men rode into the very center of the camp absolutely unquestioned, and if a few horse-boys and cooks by the fires turned round to stare at them, it was with a vague, unquestioning curiosity that betrayed no apprehension.

"They do not know of the rising yet," he observed to the baron; "or they would surely be more watchful. An enemy might march right into this camp as easily as we."

"No enemy would dare come," was the vaunting reply, for the baron had now quite recovered his spirits. "Yonder is the pavilion of some great lord. Let us go there and announce ourselves."

A little while later they drew rein before a great striped marquee which was the center of a crescent of similarly framed tents, and Bertha exclaimed:

"It is the pavilion of Hapsburg. Let us enter."

CHAPTER XII.

THE EMPEROR FREDERICK.

THE interval between the years 1314 and 1347 was marked in German history by a long strife between two contending claimants to the empire, Frederick of Hapsburg-Austria, surnamed the Handsome, and Louis of Bavaria. Both claimed to be elected, and Louis used the discontent which he knew existed in the Swiss Cantons as a weapon against his rival. The whole question which ultimately resulted in Swiss freedom was at first very simple.

Should the Swiss be considered vassals of the empire or of the Counts of Hapsburg? The emperor had in former times granted the Forest Cantons certain privileges. But that emperor was also Count of Hapsburg, Rudolph, the founder of his house.

When his son Albert tried to take away these privileges, twenty years later, he was not the undisputed emperor, Adolph of Nassau being his rival. The Swiss therefore took sides with Adolph, and claimed that only the emperor could take away what the emperor had given.

Now that Adolph was dead and Albert murdered, came Frederick of Fepsburg, claiming to be emperor, and Louis his rival, and the Swiss had timed their rising well to take advantage of the dispute by claiming the protection of Louis and ignoring the claims of Frederick as emperor.

But Frederick was resolved to make them obey him, whether as Count of Hapsburg, Duke of Austria or Emperor of Germany, and here he was at Zurich with an army of thirty thousand splendidly armed knights to put down the cantons.

So much the fugitives from Unterwalden Schloss knew, as they approached the great marquee which bore on a shield at the door the black double-headed eagle of Hapsburg-Austria.

There was not even a sentry in front of the marquee, and every one seemed to be keeping indoors, in sufficiently disconsolate mood, for rain in camp soon takes away the romance of war.

There were, however, loud voices in laughter, and the rattle of dishes, that told how the new emperor was probably engaged; and the Baron of Unterwalden advanced to the tent-door and entered, without more ceremony, closely followed by Red Rudiger, carrying the Lady Bertha, nearly fainting, in his arms.

Their entrance produced a stir of surprise, and brought them in full view of a brilliant scene.

Wet and muddy as was all outside, within the emperor's marquee there was nothing but splendor and luxury.

Living, as the medieval warriors did, much in the camp, moving from battle to battle, they were apt to spend much time in accumulating comforts around them in their tents, and Frederick the Handsome was the most luxurious of princes.

The great striped marquee stretched back for more than a hundred feet in length, by as many broad, and was lined with rich stuffs glittering with gold, while the earth beneath was covered with a profusion of Turkish and Syrian rugs, then just growing common through trade with the East.

Oriental couches, with piles of silk cushions, were placed around a great table, covered with the richest plate, and around the table on these couches was gathered a richly dressed crowd of

nobles and ladies, served by boys in rich livery, many of them negroes or Moors.

At the head of the table, on a couch by himself, reclined the center of all the splendor, the Emperor Frederick.

Even Bertha, exhausted as she was, could not help noticing his figure; as she cast her eyes languidly toward him, while she was borne forward in the arms of Red Rudiger.

She had only seen this emperor once before, when they were both children, he the elder, and it was only within a few weeks he had been crowned. She had heard of him as Frederick the Handsome, but had not associated anything special with the name.

She saw, however, even in that short glance, that he was well named. A magnificent young man, physically, in every way, he was nearly as tall as Red Rudiger, while his purely Greek profile, blue eyes, and long, blonde hair, gave him the look of one of the medieval pictures of angels. His expression was that of a gay, careless boy, for he was very little more, and his glittering attire made him a conspicuous figure, even among the haughty and brilliant nobles that surrounded him.

Bertha saw all these things with one swift glance, and then she closed her eyes and lay limp and nerveless in Red Rudiger's arms. She had not actually fainted away, but she had made up her mind to do so, and thus made a much more effective entry, carried in the arms of her stalwart conductor, than if she had come in on her own proper feet.

There was an instant hush at the table when the three figures all dripping and bedraggled, entered, and it was not till Rudiger spoke that any one stirred.

The big Swiss carried Bertha forward to the foot of the table, and then addressed a finely-clad noble, who was staring at him with supercilious surprise.

"Here is a noble lady, driven from her castle by rebels, and nigh dead with cold. As thou art a knight, give her thy place."

The noble addressed sprang up as if electrified, exclaiming:

"A noble lady! Who is it?"

"Bertha, Countess of Unterwalden in her own right," was the proud answer, as Rudiger laid his fair burden on the couch and proceeded to chafe her cold hands.

There was a general exclamation of wonder, and the young emperor started up and came hurrying down the tent, asking:

"What is this? Who are these?"

"I am Leopold, Baron of Unterwalden, and the Switzers have revolted," said the baron, his teeth still chattering with the cold. "They have burned all the emperor's castles, and Baron Herman of Schwyz was slain only yesterday. We fled in the night, and the land is even now full of fugitives like ourselves."

"Now, by St. Catherine of the wheel," cried the young emperor in his gay tones, "I am glad of it all. I feared, my lords, that these dogs would yield them to the whip so tamely that we should have no fighting; but it seems that we shall. So much the better. Cheer thee, my good Lord of Unterwalden, we will avenge thee. And is this my fair cousin Bertha, of whom I have heard so much? Why, the poor lady has fainted."

The young emperor advanced with the air of one used to adulation, and came to the side of the couch whereon Bertha lay, pale and inanimate. Rudiger, still in his dripping leathern garments, his head-piece and breastplate red with rust from the rain, still knelt by her side, chafing her hand; and to him the emperor said, curtly:

"Move to one side, sirrah. Thou art in the way."

The red-maned giant rose instantly and retired, but there was a sullen devil already gnawing at his heart as he thought:

"Yes. I am good enough in time of danger to be near her; but now, stand aside, Rudiger, for thy betters." He allowed none of this to escape from his soul to his face however, and stood perfectly impassive, as the emperor took his place by Bertha's side, knelt down and began to throw off her wet wrappings with the skill of a veteran cavalier of James.

In truth, in the fourteenth century all youths of noble blood began their training as pages and squires to attend on ladies, and were usually quite dexterous at employments now performed entirely by maids.

Soon the cloaks, heavy with the rain, were cast aside, and the beautiful banquet robes of Bertha, all flashing with jewels, were revealed.

The emperor began to look earnestly at her, and to perceive how beautiful she was, even as she lay apparently dead before him. Then he said aloud:

"Sweetest Lady Bertha, would that our meeting had come earlier, for I swear that thou art fit to rule over all the world."

And Bertha was not so insensible but that a warm color visited her cheek, and she opened her eyes on him, murmuring:

"Where am I?"

"In the arms of thy true knight," was the whispered answer of the emperor.

Red Rudiger heard it, and drew in his breath with a sort of hiss.

CHAPTER XIII.

COUNT RUDIGER.

RED RUDIGER, who had never seen a court before, drew in his breath hard, with a spasm of mortal pain and fury, when he heard the emperor's caressing words to the lady whom the Switzer worshiped as a goddess.

Then his ill-humor vanished as Bertha raised herself from the couch, saying:

"Thanks, my liege. I am well, now that I have seen your majesty at last. I am but a poor distressed lady, come to claim your protection."

"And by the splendor of Heaven thou shalt have it, and vengeance over all thy foes, sweet lady," was the fervent answer of the emperor; who turned for the first time to look at Rudiger.

Frederick of Austria was too keen a gallant not to divine the presence of a rival, however humble, and he had noted the tall Swiss as he first waved him aside from Bertha.

Now he turned on him and looked at him critically from head to foot, a scrutiny which the hunter bore with an ill grace.

Red Rudiger was chafing with a feeling of wounded pride and a sense of some indefinable superiority in the splendidly-dressed and easy-mannered gentleman before him, whom he knew in one moment to be the emperor and his rival in love, if the gay gallant so chose.

It was the same feeling which had chafed him into his battle with Count Rudolph of Schönstein, with the difference that he knew all his fighting would be useless here.

The emperor looked at him narrowly, and then turned to Bertha, asking:

"Who is this gentleman, cousin?"

The word "gentleman" fell like a soothing balm on Rudiger's soul, and his face became placid in a moment, but he listened eagerly for Bertha's answer.

The lady had preserved all her tact, for she was nowhere so much at home as when conducting an intrigue.

Her reply was warm and earnest.

"That, my liege, is the bravest man and truest subject of the house of Hapsburg left in all the Cantons. He saved me from the flames of Unterwalden at the risk of his life, smote down the traitor Rudolph of Schönstein, who dared to offer me insult, and he stands here today, my liege, a hunted and landless man, for the love of your house. Oh, my liege, grant me but one boon, and I will bless you forever."

"I would grant a thousand to the owner of those bright eyes," was the instant response.

Bertha's eyes and cheeks glowed at the compliment, and she looked as beautiful and proud as ever, as she replied:

"This gentleman, my liege, has overcome the traitor Rudolph of Schönstein, whose lands are forfeit to the empire. He is also his brother, disowned and abandoned. My liege, give the traitor's lands to the true man and make him knight and noble by right, as he is by nature."

Rudiger's face turned crimson in a moment. He thought that she was lying for him, and yet the temptation was so mighty that he said no word, but only looked imploringly at Bertha, striving to catch her eyes, which she averted obstinately.

The young emperor hesitated.

"Rudolph of Schönstein is an attainted traitor," he observed, gravely; "but he never had a brother lawfully born."

"Brothers by blood are not always brothers where the law comes in," was the wily answer. "I beseech your majesty not to press me to say more than a lady may say, but to grant my request on your knightly truth."

"Nay then," was the rather reluctant answer; "I have given my word, and it may not be broken. What is thy name, friend?"

This he said, rather coldly to Red Rudiger, who made the low reply:

"Rudiger, my liege."

"Kneel down then," replied the young emperor with a slight shrug. "Remember, my fair cousin, that if harm comes of this, 'twill be thy blame."

"I take it on myself," was the quick answer. "My liege will not regret if he keep his word."

The mountaineer, completely puzzled and not knowing whither to turn in such a gay assemblage, knelt down, all muddled as he was.

Frederick of Austria drew his bright sword, waved it thrice in the air and then smote Rudiger on the shoulder saying:

"Rudiger, thou kneltst down. Rise up, Rudiger, Ritter and Graf, knight and count, Lord of Schönstein in the Tyrol and all the lands that thereto appertain. Be faithful, true and valiant, and never suffer blow after this."

The new-made knight and count rose slowly to his feet as if dazed and stunned, and a moment later dropped on his knees once more at the feet of the emperor, kissing the hem of his garment and sobbing out in broken tones:

"God bless your majesty. I am not fit—not worthy of this."

The emperor looked down on him not unkindly this time.

"See that thou provest that thou canst be worthy," he answered, in a low tone. "Thou hast made a great leap in a small space of time."

Rudiger bowed his head to the very earth in new-born humility, and then rose quietly and retired to the outer circle, where he remained a silent spectator of what followed.

His heart was full of gratitude to Bertha for what she had done, and of remorse at what he thought to be his churlish suspicions of the noble and good emperor, so great had been the effect of a few kind words from a handsome youth, sitting in the chair of the Caesars.

Meantime the emperor, full of hospitality and ardor, gave orders for the comfort of the guests thus unexpectedly thrown on his hands.

The Lady Bertha was surrounded by those of her friends who had seen her in Vienna during the time of the late emperor, Albert; while the Baron of Unterwalden was dolefully relating his troubles and escape to a group of nobles whom he knew.

The emperor was assiduous in his attentions to the lady, and the baron had no lack of friends; but poor Rudiger found himself, in spite of his new-made honors, quite solitary.

No one seemed inclined to notice or speak to him till the Court Chamberlain approached, at a private intimation from his master, and begged the favor of the Count of Schönstein's company in his tent.

The big mountaineer, eagerly grateful for the favor, willingly accompanied the pompous old Margrave of Brandenburg to his pavilion; and as they emerged they found that the storm was clearing up, the rain having ceased, while the camp was all astir with grooms and armorers repairing damages.

Rudiger, in his rough leathern jerkin and hose, with his rusty half-armor, looked but a sorry figure as he followed his gorgeous conductor, but his feelings of embarrassment vanished as soon as the chamberlain was alone with him in his tent.

Then the old margrave told him:

"The most gracious emperor orders, my lord count, that you proceed at once to your castle in the Tyrol, with an escort, and raise all of your new vassals to assemble here within a week. You are to start to-night."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW LORD.

THE old seneschal of Schönstein was dozing in his chair in the hall of the castle when Peter Munk, the son of the gate-keeper, came running to say that the count's train was coming up the valley with the banner of Schönstein at its head.

The seneschal rubbed his eyes and jumped up with unusual alacrity.

"Now praise to our Lady of the Ill," he said; "it is time that my lord did come home, for these poachers will have every chamois killed off the mountain if he do not take order with them."

Then the old man hurried down to the gate, telling Peter to rouse up the retainers and tell the people of the village how their lord was come home again after long absence at the emperor's court.

"And who knows, Peter," chuckled the old man, "whether he has not brought home a bride with him? Perhaps that lovely lady that came to visit us last spring."

The old man smacked his lips as he thought of the beautiful Bertha, who had indeed captivated all hearts during her visit to the castle a few months before, and then hobbled down to the gate as well as his rheumatism would allow him.

The warder at the gate had already opened the portcullis and lowered the bridge, for the banner of the lord could now be very plainly seen followed by a glittering troop of men-at-arms and a line of rumbling baggage-wagons.

The people in the village below the castle were already running out into the long straggling street to stare at the cavalcade, and the herdsmen on the cliffs above the valley were calling out to each other in the shrill Tyrolean "yodel" to show that they too had spied the train.

Pretty soon the train had reached the village and the seneschal could see the well-known figure of his master, clad in complete mail, riding at the head of the men-at-arms at a slow and dignified pace.

"He must indeed have a bride with him," muttered the old man, rubbing his hands, "or he would never come so slowly. My lord was wont to kill more horses by hard riding than any knight of the Tyrol."

He stood there at the gate watching the advancing cavalcade till it was within a few hundred feet of the castle, when something in the knight's figure attracted his notice.

"How stout and large he has grown in these few months," he ejaculated. "My lord was wont to be slender in frame."

But all his cogitations were cut short by the near approach of the train, followed by a crowd of gaping villagers, and into the court rode the

Lord of Schönstein with his visor down, followed by his men-at-arms, never heeding the bows and welcome of the old man.

Once in the court, the knight raised his visor, disclosing the face of Red Rudiger, and shouted in thundering tones:

"God save the Emperor Frederick! I, Rudiger, Knight and Count of the Schloss of Schönstein, hereby take possession of my lordship, by virtue of the emperor's patent, and I call on all loyal men to maintain me in my rights. God save the emperor!"

There was a silence of wonder and expectation in the court-yard at these words, and the old seneschal faltered out:

"And where then is our Lord Rudolph? Is he dead?"

The new lord looked down on the old man not unkindly as he said:

"He is not dead, but has fled to the rebel Switzers who have revolted against our Lord Frederick of Austria. His title and estates are forfeit and his life, too, if he be taken alive. I am now the Lord of Schönstein. Master Martin, let them see the patent."

A little man in a black gown, riding on a mule in humility among the tramping chargers, here pulled out a huge sheet of blazoned parchment, with a red seal, and began to read aloud the patent by which the emperor made Rudiger lord of the valley; and while he was reading the soldiers were dismounting and taking rapid possession of the castle with the dexterity of men used to that sort of work. The fact was that the old Chamberlain of Brandenburg, anticipating that there might be some trouble in Rudiger's taking possession of his new lordship, had sent a strong force and a keen lawyer with him, both with a view of putting him in control of his people and in keeping watch over his after movements.

The big mountaineer, though he was in command of all the soldiers, was in reality nothing but a puppet in the hands of the meek little man in the black gown riding on the mule, and the men-at-arms were under secret orders to obey the notary against Rudiger if any clash of opinions ensued.

Of all this, Red Rudiger, elated with his new dignity, knew nothing, for he had been treated with the most ceremonious respect throughout the journey, and the notary had never interfered with him in any way, seeing that the new lord was doing everything just as he had been instructed.

In fact, Rudiger had not only been docile but eager to be taught ever since he left camp, and had learned a great deal of the ways and manners of nobles from the astute old lawyer, while on the road, besides acquiring an insight into the noble art of horsemanship, in which he had been so deficient. He was no longer afraid to trot and gallop on occasion, though the handling of a lance was a thing he had never yet attempted.

Now as he sat on his horse in the castle court and looked around him he felt a thrill of pride as he reflected that all this was his at last and though he saw that the countenances of the peasants and retainers were gloomy and reserved as they listened to the reading of the patent of nobility, he trusted to his own exertion to make the people like him, for he had begun for the first time in his life to court popularity.

As soon as the reading was over, the new lord dismounted, called forth the seneschal and warder, ordered a largess of money to be distributed among the tenants, an ox to be roasted whole, a cask of wine to be broached, and all the villagers to make merry over his coming, after which he retired to the great hall, where he held levée for the next few hours.

In the mean time the quiet little man in the black gown was doing the real work of taking possession, examining the steward and principal tenants, finding what contributions in money or goods were due and whether there were any supplies in the castle.

He found everything in good order, for the Count of Schönstein, now deposed, had been a careful and prudent lord; and he was able to report to Count Rudiger that evening that whenever he chose to call for them he could raise twenty men-at-arms, fifty cross-bowmen and seventy "varlets"—grooms, helpers and so forth, to set up the tents, load wagons and follow camp in general; while there was a sum of eight thousand marks in the strong room of the castle, out of which the emperor's advance to the new lord ought to be paid at once.

Rudiger, who had never enjoyed the possession of so much money in his life, was only too willing to obey the notary's hint, for it seemed to him as if such funds were never to be exhausted.

The lawyer soon had his account made out, by virtue of which he took possession of a thousand marks for a week's work, and then suggested that the count should send out his summons at once for the men to assemble next day, that they might return to Zurich and the banner of the emperor.

But here Rudiger suddenly turned obstinate. No. He had not yet had time to get warm in his new seat and he must be allowed to remain

at Schönstein Schloss at least three days that the people might learn to love him.

"Otherwise," said he, with much reason, "when I go away they may seize the castle in my absence, declare for Count Rudolph, and so leave me a landless lord."

The lawyer grinned a sort of cold, selfish smile as he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"We have provided for that, my lord count."

"And how?"

"My lord will leave behind him in the castle the emperor's garrison, the troop which has put him in possession, and will take with him all the fighting force of the village. Then his majesty will be secured from any possibility of losing the lordship of Schönstein."

"But suppose that these men are discontented and mutinous on the way and desert to their old lord?" said Rudiger.

The old lawyer grinned again.

"In that case, my lord count will still be a knight and able to do service with his single lance near the emperor's banner."

Rudiger frowned and stamped his foot angrily.

"Dost think me a child?" he asked. "How if I say that I will not leave the castle before three days?"

Again the notary grinned, in the quiet, superior way of a man who thinks he has to deal with a fool.

"In that case I should be compelled to leave the castle with the emperor's men, leaving my lord in the position of a vassal who has refused his liege lord due obedience."

"Well!" growled Rudiger, in a tone of angry suspicion. "What then?"

"And in that case my lord would find himself all alone in his castle to compel the obedience of his own vassals as he best could."

The new lord looked keenly at the wrinkled face of the notary and was silent for some minutes. They were alone in the bed-chamber that had been Count Rudolph's, the old seneschal had lighted them up there and had gone to bed himself, and all the castle was buried in slumber.

Master Martin, the notary, besides doing a great deal of business during the day, had also been enjoying himself in the steward's room in a manner not unusual for him. The fact was that he had been drinking just enough to make him reckless and pot-valiant, while he felt quite secure as to Rudiger being in his power.

"Do you mean then that I must depart for Zurich, whether I like it or not?" asked Rudiger, after a pause, during which he had been watching Master Martin keenly.

"I mean that the emperor sent you here to please his favorite, and that you must do his will," replied Master Martin, coarsely, for the notary already looked on Rudiger as a vulgar lout who was proving ungrateful to the hand that had raised him.

The new baron said nothing but his eyes began to dilate as he sat and looked at the lawyer, and had the latter been quite sober he would have hesitated ere going any further. But Master Martin was too much irritated at the obstinacy of one he considered to be a rude peasant, raised by luck, to keep his tongue still. Besides this he was drunk enough to think it a fine thing to tell this lout a piece of his mind and let him know his true place.

"Hark thee, Rudiger," he went on, "if I were thou I would do the duty on which thou hast been ordered and say as little as possible about it. A week ago thou wert a peasant, till the lady Bertha put thee where thou art, to get thee out of the way. Play thy part properly and thou mayst live to a good old age, wed some lady not too rich to disdain thine alliance and found a new house in the Tyrol. But if thou art obstinate, the hand that raised thee can drop thee as soon, and then where art thou? Think over this before to-morrow and so farewell."

He rose from his seat and was moving unsteadily toward the door, when Rudiger, whose eyes were now fairly glaring out of their bloodshot corners, raised his hand and said in a low, hoarse tone:

"Sit down again, Master Martin. I have a word or two to say on this matter."

"Say it to-morrow," was the answer.

"Nay, I must say it now," replied Rudiger, in the same low tone, but drawing up his feet under his chair as he spoke.

"And why?" asked the notary, and as he said it he turned to face the knight with a sneer.

"Why should I listen to words from one I hold in the hollow of my hand? See, here are the emperor's private orders in his own hand, which place thee in my power, with all thy thews and sinews, as securely as a rabbit in the snare of the hunter. Now why should I listen?"

As the lawyer spoke he waved in the air a piece of parchment which he drew from his breast, and Rudiger saw on it the imperial seal.

"Why should I listen?" repeated the lawyer, triumphantly.

"Because I choose!" suddenly shouted Rudiger, as he sprung from his seat with all the concentrated fury which had been repressed so long.

In an instant he had clutched the other by the throat with a gripe that prevented his crying out, and was shaking him to and fro like the rabbit Master Martin had just quoted in the jaws of a hungry mastiff.

The knight was so transported with rage that for some instants he could do nothing but shake, uttering low furious snarls and growls like a wild beast, till the other man was black in the face and hung limp and nerveless from his hands as if dead.

Then Red Rudiger cast him down on the bed with a last curse of gratified anger and said:

"Ah, at last! That feels better! Now who is the rabbit?"

His rage had vanished in a feeling of complete satisfaction and enjoyment, and he picked up the paper which had fluttered to the floor in the short struggle, with the smiling remark:

"Master Notary, thou hast good brains in a little body, and therefore thinkest that men with big bodies have no brains at all. But therein thou hast made a mistake this time. Sit up there, and read me this paper."

He closed in a tone of stern import, and the poor notary, whose wits were nearly shaken out of him in Rudiger's terrible grasp, feebly sat up on the bed and obeyed him as well as he could.

The paper proved to be a command from the Emperor Frederick "to all faithful subjects and especially the lieutenant of the lancers of Hapsburg," to obey the bearer, Martin von Pferdthal, in all things, even to matters of life and death.

"So," observed Rudiger, grimly, "thou mightst even have told them to kill me, is't not so? Well, come now, Master Martin, take thy pen quickly and put in my name, instead of thine own, to this warrant, or 'twill be the worse for thee."

CHAPTER XV.

THE WARRANT.

THE lawyer stared, gasping, at the soldier as he gave him this order.

"Put in thy name!" he stammered. "I dare not. 'Twould be more than my life is worth."

Red Rudiger laughed in his grim way.

"'Twill be more than thy life is worth to disobey me. Bethink thee, my little man, that we are alone, and the window of this room is a good fifty feet from the stones of the court. Say that I drop thee down thence: where is the force of thy warrant? Come, take thy pen quickly, and do as thou best canst."

"But, noble count," protested Master Martin, "you ask a thing hard to do. The name is written in ink, and cannot be erased without showing traces of the work."

Rudiger advanced and laid his strong hand on the other's shoulder.

"Hark thee, Master Martin, I am no clerk, as thou knowest; but I am a man of my hands that always keeps his word. If thou canst find no way to put my name in this parchment, I must even take thee to the top of the donjon, throttled, and throw thee over to save myself. If thou art once dead, the men will obey me. Now think and decide."

His tones were low and quiet, but his grasp was as heavy as ever, and Master Martin shivered as he looked up into the fiery eyes of the Swiss, where the blood-streaks were prominent with anger.

"My lord does not understand the difficulty," he protested. "Had I another piece of parchment I could copy this one with the name altered, but to change this cannot be done."

Rudiger nodded his head slowly.

"I am not a man of unreason. Thou sayest true. Yonder is plenty of parchment in the chest."

He pointed to the large chest, then a common piece of furniture, which supplied the place of our bureaux and drawers.

The poor notary shambled over toward it, and found, as Rudiger had said, plenty of parchment and vellum, with ink-horns and pens, just as Rudolph had left them when he went to Switzerland on that quest for the white chamois, which had resulted in meeting Hilda and captivity by her simple beauty of person and character.

Master Martin fussed and fidgeted for long over the parchments to gain time to think. He was a man of courage and determination, and was already planning some way to deceive Rudiger and make his escape.

At last he said:

"There is nothing here that will do. Let me go down to the room of the steward. There may be some there."

Rudiger laughed aloud, and held up a piece of parchment of the proper size, saying:

"Sit thee down, Master Martin, for if I am satisfied, surely thou shouldst be happy. This will do."

The notary glanced round him for some way of escape; but seeing none, did as he was bid; and was about to copy the paper, when Rudiger stopped him by laying his hand on his arm, gently enough, but firmly.

"Have a care, Master Martin," observed he, quietly, "that thou makest this paper like the other; and play me no tricks. I am no clerk,

but there is a chaplain in this castle, one Father Hilary, who can read for me. See, therefore, that thou writest fairly and well, or it will be so much the worse for thee."

Master Martin shivered again, for, in fact, he had been thinking over an easy way of deceiving a man who could not read writing, by giving him a worthless paper.

Then he set to work.

Now, Master Martin was one of those men who take a pride in their work; and, having once resolved to do it, he soon produced a copy that could not be told from the original, save by the difference of names and the absence of the imperial seal.

Rudiger took it up and inspected it, gravely.

"Show me my name," he said to the notary.

Master Martin pointed it out.

"Is it the same as in my patent?" the knight asked.

"Certainly; Rudiger, Knight and Count of Schönstein."

"We will see," replied the Swiss, gravely, and then he drew forth the famous patent of nobility, and studied his name closely, letter by letter, till he had convinced himself that there was no fraud in that part of the paper.

"Now, put on the seal," he said.

"I have none," sullenly replied the other.

"Then take it from thine own warrant, and put it on mine," retorted Rudiger, sharply. "I am no fool."

Master Martin sighed as he mentally admitted this fact. In truth, he began to feel very much like a fool himself.

The imperial seal was a mass of red wax, weighing several ounces, and more like a saucer than a seal. It was so large that it had to be put in a silver box and fastened to the document by a green ribbon with a small dab of wax.

To remove it from one parchment to another was therefore quite an easy task; and when it was over the new-made count bowed with grave politeness to the notary, and said:

"I owe you thanks, Master Martin, for this much work. A hundred marks may suffice to pay it, and here they are."

So saying he handed the notary a purse, which the other eagerly put in his pocket with a faint smile.

Then Rudiger took the parchments and locked them up in the chest, after which he turned again and came toward Master Martin.

Then the lawyer noticed for the first time that he was pale to the lips, which were drawn tight over his clinched teeth, while his eyes had a wolfish glare about them that made Master Martin tremble in spite of all his resolution.

The notary started up in fresh terror, and would have fled, had not the heavy hand of Rudiger caught him by the arm, while the Swiss said, with the same wolfish look, but in low, sweet tones:

"Sit down, Master Martin, I will not hurt thee. But I have a little question to ask thee."

Master Martin began to sweat.

"Listen," continued the count, and as he spoke he released him and sat down beside him, looking him in the eyes. "Thou saidst, awhile ago, that the emperor placed me here to please his favorite. Who is that favorite, my gentle Master Martin?"

The notary gazed at him, as pale as a ghost. He began to realize that the worst danger had not come yet, so he stammered out:

"I think my lord mistakes, and that I said something else."

"I crave pardon of Master Martin for having keen hearing," was the ironical reply, "but having been, as you know, bred a peasant, I have hunted the chamois, and listened for distant avalanches too often to mistake. Who, think you, Master Martin, is the emperor's favorite?"

"Really, my lord, I could not tell."

Master Martin bit his lips and gazed furtively at the count, with a curve, half-sneer, half-smile, on his lip; the consequence of his mingled physical fear and mental defiance of Rudiger.

The other only laughed.

"Keen, Master Martin, keen; but not keen enough. To whom do I owe this my lordship?"

As he spoke the last words, he rose slowly and towered over the amazed and terrified notary like a giant, his fingers clutching nervously at the air, like a hawk hovering over a sparrow.

"Who got me this place, hound?" he fairly shouted, the white foam flying from his lips, as he seized the unhappy wretch by the shoulders and shook him till his teeth chattered. "Who is she? Who is she?"

Poor Master Martin had the best of all excuses for not answering. He could not speak till the count's fury had exhausted itself, which it did in a little while; and then the giant began to feel ashamed of himself for using his strength on such a puny foe; so that, as before, he cast him down with a toss, not on the hard floor but on the soft bed, not hurt, but shaken into a condition of utter helplessness.

Master Martin lay there quite quiet, but already his active brain was at work again. He had found Rudiger's weak point at last, and read his secret.

Therefore Master Martin determined to trade on it in one way, if not another. He had not long to wait. Rudiger came to the bedside and asked again:

"Who is the emperor's favorite, that got me my lordship, Master Martin?"

"If I tell you the truth you will kill me," was the faint reply. "Let me die in peace, my lord."

"Tell me the truth, and I will not harm thee," answered Rudiger, paler than ever, but the wolfish glare gone out of his eyes.

"It is the Lady Bertha," was the answer of Master Martin, and then he raised his arm as if to ward a blow, fully expecting one.

But, contrary to his expectation, Red Rudiger remained silent, and Master Martin saw his face working strangely, till at last with an effort he said:

"It is enough, Master Martin. The emperor's orders shall be obeyed. I will raise the men to-morrow, and will go back to Zurich at once. You shall go with me, and show me proof of this; for by the glory of the Virgin I swear that if it be so some one shall rue it. Rise, Master Martin, and be ready in the morning."

Trembling with a new fear, the notary left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

RED RUDIGER'S BRIDAL.

THE Austrian camp around Zurich was all brilliant with fires and lanterns. The strains of martial music, which might have been thought to befit the place, had given way to the tinkling of lutes, the click of castanets, and the sweet notes of the pipe; while love songs were heard from every tent and marquee.

In fact, the Austrian nobility, having come to a wild and desolate country which they hated, on purpose to make war, and confident in their own strength, had abandoned themselves to the wildest luxury and license, relying on their thirty thousand mailed horsemen to strike terror into the foe.

Around the emperor's great marquee the revelry was particularly fast and furious. Besides the large banquetting pavilion, big enough in itself, four other tents of the same dimensions had been connected into one vast cruciform structure, where the principal nobles, with all their retinues of knights, had gathered to a grand banquet and festival.

The moon shone out overhead, paling into her last quarter; the stars twinkled in myriads, with no cloud to dim their luster; it was long past midnight; and yet the revelry continued.

The tables had been removed from the banquetting tents and the company had been dancing till they were weary, when their places were taken by a troop of professional minstrels and jugglers, who had now been amusing them for a little space of time, when the loud, harsh blare of a trumpet, close by, and the rapid clink and jingle of armor outside, mingled with the low thunder of trampling horses, silenced the music and made every one start.

At the upper end of the furthest tent, lying lazily back on a large couch and surveying the scene, was the young emperor. A brilliant group of courtiers and ladies surrounded him, among whom the Baron of Unterwalden and the Lady Bertha were quite conspicuous.

It was observed by many that the lady, on hearing the trumpet, turned pale and looked apprehensively toward the door, and the young monarch jestingly asked:

"Why, what ails our Pearl of Unterwalden? Have the trumpets of Austria a tone of peril to her? Nay, nay, not one can blow aught but good fortune to us."

"Oh, my liege," answered the lady, with a nervous laugh, "remember what perils I have passed through and forgive my terror. Every note of war brings back that terrible journey through night and tempest which brought me here at last."

As she spoke she had, half-unconscious of what she did, risen from her seat, and was looking toward the door of the tent. In the meantime the tramp and jingle of armor had grown louder, and with a great racket it stopped in front of the tent, when a hoarse voice was heard shouting some orders, and a moment later came the "clink! clink!" which told that an armed knight had dismounted and was coming to the tent.

The emperor arose with a frown; and Bertha, with an instinct of intrigue, receded from him and became lost in the crowd of ladies, just as the curtains parted, and a tall knight, with his visor down, entered the tent, strode rapidly up the long avenue of gazers, and came clanking into the sacred recesses of the court tent.

This knight wore splendid armor, and his grand frame became it well. Over his shoulder he bore a great mace, and seemed more fitted for instant battle than for the dainty circle of a court.

Straight up to the young monarch he came, his head turning from side to side, as if he was scanning the courtiers through the bars of his visor. When he saw the Baron of Unterwalden dressed in the official robes of the

vice-deputy grand equerry, a place that he had been given in consideration of his misfortunes, the tall knight nodded his head slowly, and then strode on to the front of the emperor, where he threw up his visor, and revealed the stern, handsome features of Red Rudiger.

He never offered to kneel, though the emperor looked at him with the most freezing dignity he could command, but he raised his hand to his crest as if saluting an equal, and spoke out in tones that could be heard all over the tent with its hushed assembly.

"My liege commanded that the lances and bows of Schönstein should gather under the banner of Hapsburg. They are here. I, Rudiger, have brought them, and have seen the enemy, who are within a day's march of this place."

The emperor listened to his first words with a cold and resentful look; but when the other had finished his face relaxed as he asked:

"Art sure it was the enemy, sir knight? How many are they? Where is their camp?"

"I am sure it was the men of Schwyz, Unterwalden and Uri," retorted the knight, in the same harsh tones he had used before. "Whether they are foes or not, depends on whether the Emperor Frederick will give them the same freedom that his grandfather Rudolph, of blessed memory, swore to grant. They are gathered by the Lake of Egeri on the Morgarten, and are not three thousand strong, without horsemen."

The emperor's brow grew red with anger at the tone of disrespect with which Rudiger had made his report, and he asked in his sternest way:

"And is that all that thou hast to tell us, when thou comest clanking into a court among dames of quality like a horse-boy into a tavern, Sir Rudiger of Schönstein?"

But Rudiger never blenched a whit before him. This peasant-born noble was in a state of suppressed fury, as he had been ever since he left the castle in the Tyrol. He had ridden hard to get to camp to see things for himself. On the way he had made many important military discoveries, as any man can who keeps his eyes and ears open in time of war.

"No, my liege," he said, proudly. "That is not all. I found this camp open on all sides and rode in without so much as one challenge, though there are spies and scouts of the Swiss army lying on all the hills round Zurich, watching this camp."

"Let them watch," answered the young monarch, fiercely. "When they try to attack us they shall find the talons of the Austrian eagle sharp and strong. Enough of thy homilies, Sir Rudiger of Schönstein, my ten-day noble. The emperor knows his duties to his empire. Learn thine own to him. To thy knee, my proud sir, and remember that Frederick of Germany asks advice only when he needs it."

The Swiss looked steadily at the emperor for a moment, then grounded his mace and knelt down on one knee, saying:

"I crave the emperor's pardon for over-much zeal in his cause. I will offend no more."

Frederick looked proudly down on him as he knelt.

The young emperor thought he had quelled a turbulent vassal by the mere force of his own will, and felt proportionately elated.

Rudiger, on his part, had taken from his face all semblance of expression save that of humility, and was secretly thinking:

"Master Martin lied. She is not here after all."

"Rise, Sir Rudiger," said the young monarch at last, when he thought his vassal sufficiently humiliated; "for what thou hast done, we thank thee; and there is one in this assemblage that can give thee sweeter thanks than any I can pay. Where is the Lady Bertha Von Unterwalden?"

Rudiger started up, his bronzed face flushing purple at that name, and looking eagerly round.

A moment later there was a little stir in the rear of the group of ladies; and Bertha, rather pale, but wearing a sweet smile of welcome, glided out from among the ladies toward Rudiger.

Then every one started as they heard a loud clang. The giant knight had dropped his huge mace on the platform, and stood, all trembling with emotion, staring at Bertha as if she were a ghost.

Then the emperor struck him a smart slap on the shoulder, crying out in his most jovial manner:

"Why, my lord count, be not so dashed at the sight of thy lady. We all know thy secret, man; and, 'fore Heaven, thou hast won the lady fairly. I have spoken with her guardian and cousin, the baron, and we are agreed."

Rudiger trembled more and more, for Bertha was smiling at him; the emperor's tones were full of humor; and the courtiers, ever ready to take a hint, were smiling too, though no one understood exactly what was coming.

"I beseech you, my liege, not to mock me," muttered Rudiger, hoarsely, with dry lips.

"What is your meaning?"

"My meaning is that this poor lady, having been driven from her lawful heritage by these rebellious Switzers, needs a strong arm and a brave heart to put her back in her own place. Rudiger of Schönstein, wilt thou marry the Lady Bertha and see her righted?"

For all answer the stalwart knight fell on his knees with a clang of armor, and bowed his head to the very dust at the emperor's feet.

"Oh, my liege," he groaned, "I have not deserved this bliss."

And the emperor smiled down on him with a slight expression of contempt, while Bertha turned paler than ever. As to the courtiers, they did not seem to know quite what to make of it.

"Well, Sir Rudiger," said Frederick at length; "dost thou refuse?"

Rudiger started up in a moment with one of his rare and abrupt bursts of passion, made but one step to Bertha and clutched her up in his arms as if she had been a lamb in the talons of a tiger.

"Refuse!" shouted he, at the full power of his voice. "Now by the light of Heaven let me see the man who will wrong this my wife when I am by. I have her at last. Let who dares come between us hereafter."

His thundering tones echoed all over the hushed court as he strained the slight figure to his mailed breast.

Then the warrior looked down with infinite softness and tenderness, and planted his first kiss on Bertha's lips.

"This is my wife," said he, simply

CHAPTER XVII.

RUDIGER'S ORDERS.

THREE days had passed away, and still the army of the Emperor Frederick lay at Zurich, never having moved a step, while the Switzers were gathering their scanty forces of half-armed peasants from the Forest Cantons and mustering on the shores of Lakes Zug and Egeri.

It seemed as if every day must bring a movement, but none came, save in the direction of hunting festivals and banquets, in honor of the bridal of Rudiger of Schönstein and the landless Countess Bertha.

The Gross Minster had been full of people to witness the ceremony, the Archbishop Elector of Cologne had pronounced the blessing, the emperor had given away the bride, and Red Rudiger had passed three days in Paradise.

And then came a change.

The new knight had become so transformed by happiness that he could hardly be recognized as the same sullen and furious Rudiger who had been the uncouth guardian of Bertha, the almost murderer of Master Martin. He had even forgotten that astute but rash notary.

As for Bertha, she had been all that the fondest of lords could wish during those three days, lavishing on the rude mountaineer a treasure of caressing affection such as one would have deemed her vain and selfish nature incapable of showing.

The fact was that, in that supreme moment of happiness when Rudiger clutched her up before the whole court as an eagle seizes a pigeon, Bertha had owned to herself, with a strange mingling of fear and pleasure, that she had found her master. Gentle as Rudiger was with her, and mindful of her every whim, there was yet something in his actions and in the way in which he kept close to her at all times, that made her tremble, and was effectual in chasing from her the butterflies of the court.

And during the whole of the three days the emperor looked gloomy, contrary to his usual custom, drank heavily, hunted recklessly, and swore at his attendants as he had never done before.

On the third day came a change.

Rudiger of Schönstein was met, as he sallied out from his Zurich lodging in the morning, by a squire in the emperor's colors, who gave him a letter.

"On the emperor's service, my lord," he said. "The answer will be sent to the imperial headquarters."

Rudiger bowed stiffly, and turned over the letter rather puzzled. He could not read.

"I will but go in and write an answer, good fellow, if thou wilt wait and drink a cup with my squires," he said, courteously; and the emperor's messenger was only too willing to wait on such terms.

The knight went in and up-stairs to his lady's chamber, where he found Bertha just coming back from the window, looking pale.

"What is it, my lord?" she asked, anxiously.

"No bad news, I hope?"

"Faith, I cannot tell," was the frank answer, with a bashful laugh. "My lady-bird knows that I am but a peasant, after all, raised by her bounty to be a noble, and I cannot yet read a line. Will my Pearl of Unterwalden tell me what means this scroll from the emperor?"

"Then it is from the emperor?" she said, anxiously.

"Ay, sweet. Wilt read it?"

The lady broke open the seals very slowly, and glanced over the writing, then let the paper fall with a sigh.

"It is as I thought. He orders thee to take a

hundred lances and ride toward the Swiss camp, at the Morgarten."

Rudiger brightened up.

"A hundred lances! Good faith, his majesty is a gracious prince, and doth things nobly. I have but twenty, and he will give me more. Am I to have the full command, says the paper?"

"Yes, my lord," she replied listlessly, and then hesitated.

A moment later she was at his side, her hands clasped on his arm, as if pleading.

"Take me with thee, my brave lord, and let me share thy perils," she said, with a strangely earnest look.

"Nay, dearest love, that cannot be. I am bound on a rough quest, and there may be much peril therein. I must go alone. Come, write me the answer quickly, if thou wouldst send the emperor's squire home sober, for my fellows are hard drinkers below."

Bertha smiled faintly, but her face was ghastly pale as she went to the table, while her husband was bestirring himself in the house to arm his men and get them out in time, so that the emperor might not have to wait.

The lady sighed deeply as she finished her note and sent it down to the squire by a page, and then she descended to the court-yard herself, to witness the departure of her husband.

During the short time that he had been a cavalier, Rudiger, an active athlete before, had become a very fair rider, and there was no lack of nobility in his figure now as he mounted his horse, after embracing his wife, and rode clanking down the street out of the gates of Zurich and so up to the tent of the emperor.

He found a force of eighty lances, under some eight or ten knights of inferior degree to himself, assembled there; and before them was the old Margrave of Brandenburg, who at once greeted him and gave him his instructions.

"You will ride around the Swiss army, sir knight, find out the full number of men they have, and whether that notorious traitor, Rudolph, be with them. If thou canst capture him, the emperor will be well pleased with thee and reward thee. If there is any forage or food in the country, sweep it up hither, for we are running very short in those matters. Here, Master Martin, come hither."

Rudiger started slightly as he beheld once more the ill-omened face of the yellow and wrinkled notary.

"Is he to come with me?" he asked, in a tone of disgust. "And wherefore? He is not a soldier."

The old margrave looked at him with a cold stare.

"The emperor wishes it," was his only reply. "Master Martin will go with the troop as treasurer, to take charge of any money your men may gain by plunder of towns or castles."

Rudiger smiled, and very nearly burst out laughing.

"Towns and castles! Why, man, the country is as poor as the wildest valleys of the Tyrol, and there is neither town nor castle now, for the castles are burned and the villages are mere hamlets."

The old margrave looked more sour than before.

"Master Martin will go with you," was all he deigned to reply. "Your way is open, sir knight. You are expected to return by the third day at latest."

Red Rudiger shrugged his shoulders and turned his horse away, trotting off with his column of heavy horsemen, followed by their grooms, archers and *couteliers* or knife-men, on light ponies; for a hundred lances in the fourteenth century implied as many men as we now call a regiment.

No sooner had he disappeared than the old margrave went into the emperor's marquee, where he found Frederick alone, a scowl of sullen discontent on his handsome young face.

"Well, is he gone at last?" demanded the young monarch, impatiently.

"He is safely off, your majesty; and I have given Master Martin his instructions, as your majesty directed."

"Now Heaven be praised!" cried Frederick. "I have waited long enough the pleasure of this boor."

The old margrave hesitated a moment till the emperor angrily demanded:

"What is the matter. Art thou grown deaf in thine old age, my lord?"

"If my liege would grant me license to speak—" began the old noble, and there was something so meaning in his looks that Frederick instantly replied:

"Speak, speak! Heaven's mercy! What's the matter, that thou lookst as glum as a funeral mourner? Tell thy thought freely, so that it be not to give *her* up, for I swear I'll do that for none; no, not if my crown hung in the balance on the action."

"I would then advise your majesty to be circumspect," said the old margrave, soberly. "Bethink you that your rival, Louis of Bavaria, is still in the field and that many nobles have come to his banner. This Swiss fool is now devoted to your cause for the benefits he thinks you have heaped on him, by giving him a fief no one else dared to take and a wife with no dower save her face. Bat, mark me this: I

have watched him closely and he is a dangerous man, sire. Let him once find that your majesty designs to wrong him in any manner and there will be sore trouble in this camp."

The young emperor listened attentively while he spoke and then curled his lip in a sneer of scorn, though the paleness of his face rather contradicted the expression, as he retorted:

"Let the trouble come. If this Swiss makes it, let him look to his head. I have made him and can unmake him again. Do as I bid thee."

The margrave shrugged his shoulders slightly, then bowed and left the tent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RUDIGER'S RIDE.

THE exiled and disinherited Count of Schönstein, now only known among his adopted compatriots as White Rudolph, the Hunter of the Rigi, was seated on a fallen block of stone, among the ruins of what had been Gessler's castle, putting a fresh string to his cross-bow and watching the country toward Zurich.

Not far off and sleeping in the shade of a smoke-blackened buttress, lay Max Brugg and young Anton of Melchthal.

The Swiss Confederates were indeed scattered all over the country, for the convenience of subsistence, each man keeping near his own home and thus living without cost to the commonwealth.

From where Rudolph sat he could see the little hamlet of Kussnacht and the spot where Gessler had fallen beneath the arrow of William of Altorf, with the winding road that led to Zurich. Behind him lay the green slopes of Rigi, the blue waters of Lakes Zug and Lucerne; and far away in the south-west towered the snowy summit of the Virgür Mountain among her fellows.

Rudolph looked gloomy and careworn. He had heard, from the Swiss spies that were always hanging round the outskirts of the emperor's army at Zurich, how Rudiger had been put into his place, how he had brought his men under the banner of Hapsburg and how he had wed Bertha.

He had heard also far more than Red Rudiger knew of the camp gossip that made a jest of his old comrade's name, and made Bertha the guilty favorite of a monarch who had pretended to heap favors on the sturdy Swiss only to cover his own pleasures and to disgrace the rude warrior.

Now as he sat there, watching the distant road for any indication of the enemy's movements, the brave and generous knight felt very gloomy. His love for Hilda made him anxious to save her brother from the stain of treason to freedom which he knew justly belonged there, and he had kept on assuring his Swiss friends that Rudiger was at heart true to their cause, and would come out all right in the end.

At the same time, he found it very difficult to convince them of any such thing. The plain Switzers had a great deal of common sense, and while they revered and admired Rudolph and pretended to believe him, he could not help seeing that they held Rudiger for a traitor despite all his friend's protestations.

Chewing the cud of these bitter thoughts, wherein the only element of sweetness was the knowledge that Hilda loved him, White Rudolph became aware that a cloud of dust was coming rapidly toward him on the Zurich road.

In a moment his reverie vanished, all the instincts of a soldier replacing it. Waiting was over; the time for action had come, for yonder were the enemy!

Already he could see the gleam of armor in the midst of the dust, and knew it could only be an Austrian scouting party.

But whither was it coming and why was it not heading toward the Swiss camp at Morgarten?

Not waiting to settle this point, the young hunter hastily finished the stringing of his arbalest, and hurried to wake up his two friends, when all three stole away among the ruins behind the crest of the hill and made an ambush on the same rock from which William of Altorf had shot Hernan Gessler, some ten days before.

They had not been posted there many minutes before the regular clank of armor and thunder of horse-hoofs announced that the enemy were approaching.

From their ambush in the branches of a great spreading oak tree they saw the column come trotting up the ascent, a hundred good lances with a great following of archers and others on ponies, the whole headed by a tall knight in rich armor, damascened with gold.

Rudolph started when he saw this knight, albeit his visor was down. He knew the armor only too well, for it had come from his own castle of Schönstein in the Tyrol.

But Black Max and Anton only saw a strange Austrian lord, and Rudolph said no word to guide them to the truth.

The tall knight halted his troop by Gessler's castle, and gave some orders, which soon sent some twenty or thirty light horsemen and archers scouring the woods on either side of the famous hollow way that had proved so fatal to Gessler. It was evident that he was an expe-

armed warrior and did not propose to be caught in an ambush, if he could help it.

The three Switzers kept quite still in the tree, hidden by the full foliage, and saw the scouts pass right underneath them with no indication of discovery.

Presently the main column started on its way, and traversed the pass below them in safety, and finally they could see the whole body clanking along on its way to the Rigi, between the waters of Zug and Lucerne.

Then Rudolph said to Anton:

"We have them now. They must come back by this way. Run thou to Kussnacht and thence bid the Lucerners come hither quickly. Max Brugg, be it thine to bring the men of Zug from the other side. We must take them by surprise and kill or capture all of them. I will stay and watch."

The Switzers were not slow to comprehend this, and without more ado slipped down from the tree and started off on their missions, leaving White Rudolph alone.

As he had said, the capture of the Austrian party appeared to be almost certain. They had come to a place where the western arm of Lake Lucerne, called the Bay of Kussnacht, approaches the borders of Lake Zug within a mile and a half, and between the two lakes lay the green mountains of the Rigi. To get back to Zurich there were only two roads, one back up the hollow way, and the other round the south side of Zug, through the very heart of the country where the Confederates were encamped by the banks of the Egeri See (or Lake) on the slope of Morgarten.

It seemed as if the Austrian leader had run into a trap from which there was no escape.

The only thing that made Rudolph doubtful of entire success was the fact that he had recognized Red Rudiger. He knew the keen wits and dauntless resolution of that stalwart warrior too well to dream that he would surrender without fighting, and he knew that the struggle would be a hard one. Rudiger had nearly five hundred men with him, and the Swiss could not hope to muster more than three hundred, so that their advantages of position and ambush would all be needed.

He went to the edge of the cliff and watched the train winding up the Rigi. As he had expected, it took the way toward the chalet where Rudiger Stauff had formerly lived.

Rudolph sighed as he thought to himself what a picture of desolation that chalet now presented. Hilda, broken-hearted at her brother's desertion of the cause she deemed so sacred, had gone from the chalet and had taken refuge with old Arnold of Melchthal, whose daughter Elsa had always been a great friend of hers.

The chalet had stood empty and deserted ever since, the cattle and goats driven away, the very swine taken from their pens, while the green summit of the Rigi was as solitary as in the days when Helvetia was a wilderness.

The watcher beheld the train go slowly up the mountain and cluster awhile on the summit by the chalet. He waited in the full expectation of seeing them come back, for he had made up his mind that Rudiger had run into danger for the purpose of carrying off his sister.

But after a long while he saw them go on again, disappearing behind the mountain, and then it became evident that Rudiger had made up his mind to make the dangerous circuit of the Swiss army, running the gantlet of all his foes.

As Rudolph arrived at this conviction, his own allies began to come in by groups of two or three, for the Swiss had been kept on the alert for some days past. The exiled knight, as keen a soldier as Rudiger, and resolved to outwit him, left only a few men on watch over the hollow way, and started with the remainder for Lake Zug.

He knew that Rudiger could only pass through the country by making a circuit of two lakes lying side by side, while the Swiss could cross one and reach the other in half the time by a straight course.

There were plenty of boats on Lake Zug, and the country was full of the friends of freedom, so that within two hours from the time that the Austrians passed the ruins of Gessler's castle, White Rudolph, Black Max, Arnold of Melchthal, and several hundred Swiss confederates were gathered between Lake Zug and the little Egeri See, barring all egress in that direction and leaving to Rudiger only one way out of his troubles, by charging through the main body of the Swiss on the other side of the little lake, on the slope of Morgarten.

The spies and scouts had been in full employment on the cliffs all this time, watching the course of the band of Austrian raiders.

The enemy had ridden straight round Lake Zug, through the village of Art, which they plundered and burned in true medieval ruthlessness, and thence ascended the cliffs of the great Rossberg on the opposite side.

The Rossberg is a great hill of some three thousand feet in height, by about five miles in length, with overhanging cliffs on the side toward the north, on which the Switzers were gathered.

It is subject, after long rains, to extensive landslips on that side, and it was with a confi-

dent hope of seeing some such disaster befall the trampling horsemen as they rode along the brink of the Rossberg, that the Switzers watched with sullen fury the black smoke rolling up from Art, behind their foes.

But no such disaster befell them, for it was evident that Red Rudiger knew the country thoroughly, and avoided the dangerous places, while he availed himself of his lofty position to spy out his enemies below.

They saw his train ride slowly along the edge of the Rossberg, in full view, and then disappear behind the ridge going to the east, after which they recognized the fact that he was about to take a still wider circuit, and give them the slip by circling Lake Zurich itself.

This was the opinion of old Arnold of Melchthal, but Rudolph shook his head, saying:

"Yonder knight is wary, but not so wary as that. He will try to cut his way home toward the edge of the Swiss camp. We must be there to meet him, and I must have my horse and lance. If I can overthrow him, we have them all. If he comes through, the rest will follow."

An hour later, Rudolph of Schönstein, once more armed and mounted as a knight, sat on his horse by the slope of Morgarten, waiting for the man who had his lordship, while twelve hundred stout Switzers were gathered at his back.

And, as the sun set, they heard the clank of armor, which told that Red Rudiger was coming to the battle.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TWO KNIGHTS.

It was indeed true that Red Rudiger was coming. He had scoured the country far and wide, partly because he was ordered, but more from pure destructive instinct. He had come there in the first place more to find Hilda than anything else, for Rudiger had such a childish delight in his new honors and wealth that he wished to make his sister a partaker therein. When he found the chalet deserted, he had fallen into a fit of jealous fury, the more that his conscience reproached himself as the cause, and had ridden straight away to the village of Art, suspecting that the girl had fled thither.

Finding himself again foiled there, for the villagers had fled to the woods, he vented his anger by burning the senseless houses, and then went up the Rossberg, whence he soon discovered the fact that all the country was roused against him.

Now Rudiger was one of those men whose very virtues tend to make them the worse, when once they have gone wrong. He was brave and proud, sensitive to blame and open to a fault, and yet he found himself in the position of a traitor to his old friends, execrated by all, through the delicate and self-sacrificing love he bore to one he deemed an unfortunate lady, pure as an angel.

He had taken one or two prisoners, reckless boys of Art, and had been surprised and incensed at the insolence and stubbornness with which they had defied him when brought before him. He found that his identity was known, and that a multiplicity of what he considered vile slanders were afloat in the camp of his foes concerning his idolized wife.

Too proud to vent his anger on the puny prisoners, he had questioned Master Martin, whose ill-omened visage was ever near him, and that gentleman, to his surprise, had quite changed the tone which he had been wont to hold in the Tyrol on that subject.

Master Martin not only made light of the stories, but recommended him to kill the prisoners as the best way of silencing all scandal. The haughty warrior disdained the deed, and let the prisoners go unharmed; but none the less his fury, that had slept so long, began to waken again, and he made up his mind to return to Zurich at once, by cutting his way, if it were necessary, through the whole Swiss army, which he knew lay between him and Bertha.

In vain did Master Martin plead with him and point out that the way round Lake Zurich was quite open and absolutely safe. The stubborn knight would listen to nothing, silenced the notary by a threat, and rode straight for the edge of the Morgarten and the Swiss camp.

Here, at sunset, he came in sight of the dark body of his foes, bristling with pikes and pole-axes, while in front of all towered the lofty form of Rudolph of Schönstein.

Master Martin saw them, too, and had the temerity to lay his hand on Rudiger's bridle, saying imploringly:

"My lord, I beseech you to turn aside and ride hard for the end of the lake. All our foes are here, and we can easily escape; for they have no horses."

Rudiger smiled grimly.

"I see one on horseback," he answered, "and his armor is like the armor of the man who insulted my wife. He and I have a quarrel to settle, and this is as good a place as any. We will go forward, Master Martin. If it please thee to leave us and ride away alone, thou hast thy liberty so to do. For the rest of us, our way lies straight for Zurich."

Master Martin was a prudent man, but no coward, so he answered:

"Be it so then, my lord. I will stay with the rest."

Rudiger's face lightened up and he patted the little notary on the shoulder, saying kindly:

"Stay in the midst of the men, Master Martin, that the enemy may not see thee; for I would not have thee slain unawares. Forward the light horsemen and cross-bowmen!"

Their conversation took place while the Austrian party was halted and getting into order to assail the Swiss, who on their part stood in a dense mass, bristling with pikes, calmly waiting the onset of their foes.

The only horseman visible in the whole Swiss array was Rudolph, and as soon as he saw that the preparations of his foes were all complete, he trotted slowly forward and waved his lance in the air, the well-known signal of defiance for single combat.

In modern times such a defiance would not have been noticed; but in those days when the fantastic spirit of chivalry was in its very prime, the signal was understood and appreciated.

The cross-bowmen, who were just about to sally out and begin to shoot at the dense Swiss array, immediately halted and looked expectantly at their leader, who on his part at once rode forward out of his array, as a signal that he was ready to answer the defiance as a knight.

Rudolph bowed his head, gave his lance a final wave and set it in the rest, when the two knights set spurs to their horses and rushed at each other.

Rudiger, remembering his victory over Rudolph, and relying on his superior strength, expected to send him down at once; but he forgot the immense advantage which his rival possessed in being bred up to horsemanship and the use of the lance from a child.

The big mountaineer, while he had made wonderful progress in the art of equitation since his accession to honors, was unused to handling a lance, and depended on main strength for the victory.

He sat up straight in his saddle and held his weapon straight, but did not understand yet how to make himself one with his steed.

Rudolph, on the other hand, bent low over his horse's neck and used both rein and spur with skill to make the animal take a zigzag course and so disturb his enemy's aim.

In the moment of shock, therefore, it came to pass that Rudiger's lance slipped harmlessly by the other's shield, glancing off, while the Tyrolean knight's lance struck Rudiger full on the shield and shivered all to pieces there, casting the Austrian champion over the side of his horse to the earth, flat on his back.

In that very moment the Swiss raised a deep, hoarse shout of triumph, and their whole body came rushing forward.

The intention of Rudolph had been to demoralize the Austrians by the fall of their leader, and it seemed quite likely to succeed. Rudiger at the head of his men was a host in himself, but Rudiger overthrown was a source of panic.

The Austrians hesitated and began to turn their horses to flee, and the fate of the field seemed to be decided, when the fallen knight leaped up with a wonderful effort of his enormous strength, and seized the bridle of Rudolph's charger, even while his own steed ran wild over the plain.

In another moment Rudolph's horse was on its haunches, then pawing the air wildly, then over on its back with Rudolph beneath it, while Rudiger shouted, with the full power of his lungs:

"Charge the dogs! Long live the emperor!"

That shout reanimated the spirits of his men, and down they came at full speed, dashing into the midst of the Swiss, till the whole field became a confused melee of men and horses, while the sharp twang of arbalests, and the clang and thud of blows, told how fierce a strife was raging.

But it did not last long. The Swiss were not only superior in number but in bodily strength to the men who rode behind Rudiger, and the only dangerous part of the Austrians was the body of men-at-arms who came sweeping down in the center.

These indeed rode over everything by main weight of horse and man, after which they pursued their way scattered and broken, many being knocked off their horses, and all riding for their lives, down the slope of the Morgarten, through the fast-deepening twilight, in the direction of Zurich.

The only semblance of order lay where Master Martin rode, for the wary little notary kept shouting out his orders to keep close, knowing how much effect a single resolute voice has to arrest a panic and prevent the spreading of confusion.

As for the cross-bowmen and other light horse, after a few volleys of arrows at the melee, not caring much where their shafts went, they fled the field with singular unanimity, skirting the mass of Swiss, who were now surging to and fro over a few unhorsed men-at-arms in the center.

Thus it resulted that within ten minutes after

the time when Rudolph rode out, waving his lance, the battle was over, the greater part of the Austrians out of further danger, owing to the absence of missile weapons capable of reaching them, and Rudiger was the only man left on the field who had not surrendered or been cut down.

He stood in the midst of a circle of angry Swissers, wielding a huge pole-ax which he had wrested from one of them, and not a man could approach within the swing of his weapon without paying the penalty.

White Rudolph, after his escape under his horse, had extricated himself, and now came pressing into the ring, crying:

"Spare the good knight! Let him surrender, for he is a brave foe."

But there was an ominous growl of vengeance in the air, and more than one voice answered:

"Death to the traitor! Red Rudiger burned Arth!"

The gigantic knight was in his wildest mood of fury now. He had been stung to mortification by his easy defeat at Rudolph's hand, but was recovering his pride and confidence in his own enormous strength as he whirled the pole-ax in the air as if it had been a feather and shouted back his defiance:

"I am Rudiger of Schönstein! Live the emperor and death to all rebels! Come on, if ye dare!"

And, brave and powerful as were the Swiss, they bore back from his blows as he sprung hither and thither, till a voice in the rear cried: "Open out and give him room! Shoot the man! Are ye fools?"

This common-sense advice was instantly followed, and Red Rudiger found himself left alone, just as the darkness was becoming thick. He had a brief resting-spell, during which he looked round anxiously for a horse, and soon espied his own animal held by a Swiss in the midst of a group of footmen.

With a shout of triumph he sprung toward it, and just at that moment the few cross-bowmen of the Swiss army began to shoot at him.

Rap, rap, came the square-headed bolts on his ribs, and had it been light enough to have aimed correctly they must have pierced even his armor, good as it was.

But the uncerain light and the rapid motion of the knight made every shaft strike obliquely, and thus it resulted that in a few moments he had dashed into the midst of the footmen, stricken down the horse-holder, and had leaped into the saddle unopposed by any, when the charger gave a great leap forward and fled down to the lake, full speed, followed by a volley of arrows. Then the Swiss raised a great cry:

"Treason! Treason! Who let him go? Follow!"

And away went the fleet-footed mountain eers over the rocks, after the vanishing horseman, while the voice of Rudolph of Schönstein was heard shouting:

"Room! Room! I will take him!"

And off into the night thundered Rudolph, remounted on his own steed, galloping on the track of Rudiger.

Far ahead of both they could hear the clank of armor and the confused rallying cries of the Austrians, who were still fleeing toward the city of Zurich; and Rudolph shook his bridle and shot past the footmen on Rudiger's trail, murmuring to himself:

"He shall come back to us. I will not let him die a traitor."

CHAPTER XX.

A HUNTING PARTY.

THE Emperor Frederick had gone hunting on the north bank of the Lake of Zurich toward Rapperschwyl. Where in these days are smiling villages, nestling amid orchards, in those times spread one great mantle of forest, full of wild boars and roe deer, where wolves were by no means uncommon.

The emperor left camp in great state, with a grand retinue. He seemed to have forgotten that he had come there to make war, and that a hostile army lay within a day's march of his tents. Everything seemed to be forgotten save that he was an emperor and rich, and that the camp was full of nobles and ladies.

The old Margrave of Brandenburg was the only one who ventured to say a word in remonstrance against the imprudence of hunting in an enemy's country, and he was silenced at once by the haughty young prince, who listened to nothing but his own inclinations.

Nevertheless, the margrave, who was a wary old feudal chief, was by no means easy in his mind as he left camp in the emperor's train, and took the precaution of ordering out three hundred lances to scour the country in advance of the hunters; for he had received news from the peasants round Zurich, still faithful to the House of Hapsburg, that Swiss spies were thick in the neighborhood.

The emperor and his courtiers rode in their green hunting suits, with no arms beyond bearspears and short swords, but the old margrave made his appearance in armor, and positively refused to change it under all the gibes and sneers of his gay companions.

The consequence was that he and a little troop of men-at-arms who rode with him on their heavy Flemish horses, were soon left in the rear by the lightly armed hunters; and within an hour from the time of their departure from Zurich, found themselves alone in the forest, listening to the distant music of the baying pack and the mellow notes of the horns, as the chase swept on through the leafy arches of the forest.

In another hour even these sounds had died away, for the chase had gone out of sight and hearing.

The young emperor rode among the foremost after the hounds, and by his side, on a Spanish jennet, was the new Countess of Schönstein, her laugh the gayest of any there, her blue eyes flashing with pleasure and pride. Among all the ladies of that brilliant court, Bertha was now recognized as the leader; and the very women who had been the first to sneer at her when she was wedded to Red Rudiger, were now the most obsequious in their civility.

That the emperor showed her marked favor all could see, and that her lightest wish was law to him had been manifest ever since Rudiger started on his perilous quest, now three days ago.

From that quest he had not come back, though the broken remnants of his troop, headed by Master Martin, had straggled into camp on the second day, with a dismal tale of how the knight had been taken prisoner or killed by the savage Swiss; and it had been the common remark at court that the emperor had been happier ever since, and that the Lady Bertha showed but scant consideration for the misfortune of her absent lord, beyond requesting that a flag of truce might be sent to the Swiss camp to treat for his ransom, which the emperor had gayly promised and as gayly forgotten.

Now the emperor and his favorite were the gayest of the gay, to all appearance, as they rode along; and had soon outridden all their train, finding themselves alone with the hounds.

These animals had roused a large wild boar, gaunt and fleet, who had given them a long and severe run, till he stopped at bay in a little pool of water at the foot of a large hollow oak, and turned at once on the dogs.

A German wild boar is a very different beast from the tame swine we are accustomed to see, and is nearly as formidable as a lion, while wolves are mere playthings to his fury.

This brute stood three feet at the shoulder, with a hide like iron, and he looked a terrible sight as he champed his white tusks, from which the foam was flying, and snorted out defiance to the great hounds that were baying round him.

They were all huge dogs, built like mastiffs, with broad chests and powerful jaws, but they were cowed by the looks of the boar.

The foremost who rushed in had warned the rest by his fate, for the shaggy monster had shaken off his gripe as if the dog had been but a puppy, ripping him open in a trice with those formidable tusks; then standing with his back to the tree defying the rest.

As the hounds stood there at bay, seeking an opportunity to attack their foe in the rear and finding none, the young emperor galloped up followed by Bertha, and called out:

"Keep back! Now shalt thou see thy knight do his *dévoir* for thee."

Bertha turned very pale and pulled up her horse. The whole scene, the furious boar and dogs, the wild woods around, brought to her mind a similar scene years ago, when she had owed her life to Rudiger.

But all these thoughts were swept away in fears for her own safety, when she saw the great beast leave his cover and come charging down on the emperor.

The young monarch went straight at the boar full speed, and cast his spear with good aim, but the brute seemed to mind it no more than a rush, as it charged on and met the emperor's horse in full career.

There was a savage snort and grunt, a wild shriek of pain from the agonized charger, and then it reared up in the air and fell back, Frederick leaping off just in time to avoid being crushed, but left on foot before the savage boar.

Now the dogs did their part nobly, running at the animal from behind and seizing it in a dozen different places, tugging furiously and growling so that the attention of the boar was drawn from the young monarch, who had drawn his short sword and stood ready to face the boar's rush as best he might.

The animal turned, snorting and grunting savagely, and threw off its assailants once more, ripping up two dogs in the operation, while the emperor sought safety by running to the foot of a tree near by.

Bertha, overcome with terror, had fled the scene; and the boar, having shaken off its foes once more rushed at the emperor, who turned to clamber up the tree in haste.

It was just at this moment that a tall figure, dressed in rusty armor, made its appearance on the scene from behind a neighboring tree, and strode toward the boar, wielding a great two-handed sword.

The animal, with the savage instinct of always attacking the last foe, immediately turned its attention to the man in armor, and rushed at him, grunting savagely.

The man in armor waited firmly for its coming, whirling up his two-handed sword, and just as the boar came within distance brought down the weapon on its skull with such force as to split it open and lay the animal dead on the ground, where the hounds soon dashed at it and satiated their vengeance on the senseless carcase.

Then the man in rusty armor turned to the tree from whence the emperor was now coming, looking paler and more flurried than his wont, and said:

"The beast is dead. You were foolish to charge him single-handed. An old boar is a dangerous creature."

"Dangerous or not, I should have been badly mauled had I not met thee," responded the emperor, heartily. "And who art thou, friend?"

The man in armor had his visor down, and he did not raise it as he replied:

"I am one who has lost his place in the world, and sees before him a way to regain it."

Then he grounded the point of his sword and stood, leaning on the pommel, regarding the emperor through the bars of his visor with a gaze that was mysterious and disquieting.

Frederick looked curiously at him.

"What meanst thou?" he asked.

"I mean that *we are alone*," was the reply, in deep, solemn tones.

The emperor started slightly and glanced round him, then drew himself up to his full height and demanded:

"Is that a threat of assassination, sir knight; because thou art clad in steel and I naked?"

"It is a warning," answered the other, in the same tone. "Thou art striving to wrong a noble soul. Let justice stay thee in thy course, lest the dagger of another John of Swabia make Louis of Bavaria the sole and undisputed Caesar."

Frederick frowned back his most haughty defiance at the other, for all his pride and courage were up in arms.

"And I say to thee, on thine allegiance, bare thy face and let me see who thou art that beards Frederick of Austria. Slay me if thou darest. Who art thou, mummer, in borrowed armor?"

"I am a Swiss," was the unexpected answer, as the other drew back and poised his long sword. "I owe allegiance to Louis, and not thee; therefore be ready to die."

For all answer the young emperor leaped nimbly back, and set his horn to his lips. He was about to sound, when the other dropped the point of his sword, saying:

"It is enough. I could slay thee if I would, before a man could rescue thee, but I am a knight and scorn to take odds of any man. Thou art safe. I came to warn thee against peril. Go no more a-hunting alone, and leave thy ladies at home. Red Rudiger of Schönstein will be back at Zurich by this night. And so farewell."

Without another word the man in rusty armor turned and went away into the depths of the forest, vanishing in a maze of swamps and thickets where the emperor did not care to follow him, and leaving the latter alone to await the arrival of his train as best he might.

He had not long to wait.

Very soon the winding of horns, the tramping of horses and the voices of huntsmen announced their coming, and the emperor blew a long blast on his own horn to guide them to the spot.

Many were the exclamations of wonder and fear at the plight in which they found Frederick, with his horse killed and his dress all spattered with blood.

The young emperor, however, gave them but little satisfaction as to the way in which the boar met his death. He was, in fact, profoundly impressed with the words of the unknown man in armor, and wished to be alone to think over them.

He asked where was the Lady Bertha, and learned that she had fled, at full speed, to the city, like one completely frightened to death, causing a general panic among the ladies and part of the courtiers, who had hastily followed her.

Besides this, a rumor had spread that the Swiss were thick in the woods, bent on surprising and killing the emperor; for two of the huntsmen had been found shot through with bolts from cross-bows, and others had caught glimpses of men in armor in the woods, spying on them from a distance.

Now, for the first time, Frederick began to realize his own imprudence in venturing forth as he had, and it was with profound gratitude that he hailed the approach of the old margrave with his men-at-arms, and heard from him for the first time, of the precautions he had taken.

"The woods are indeed full of Swiss, my liege," said the old chief, "but they will not dare to strike us now, for my men are coming in from all quarters. Nevertheless, I pray you

to return to Zurich as soon as you may, for there is danger in the air."

And the emperor was only too glad to follow the advice.

CHAPTER XXI. COMING HOME.

WHEN Red Rudiger cut his way through the midst of the Swiss to escape, it was almost dark, and the shouts and cries of his foes were so deafening that he had lost all clear idea of which way he was going, and let the horse take its own road, which it did, blindly, selecting only the smoothest path.

Thus it happened that by the time he had gone a few miles, he found himself alone and began to realize that he had lost both his party and his road, being in an unknown country.

He could no longer hear the clank of armor, which he thought he had been following, and he found that his horse was failing beneath the great weight it had to carry. Therefore he pulled up to a walk, and the instant that he did so, heard the clatter of horse-hoofs behind him that told him he was still pursued.

Rudiger had thrown away the huge pole-ax, which he had used on the field, as too unhandy for horseback; he had lost his lance, and he only retained the straight stabbing sword worn by every knight, with his dagger at the other side, and a short mace hanging at his saddle-bow.

Seizing this latter weapon, he turned his horse in the road and confronted another cavalier, who came riding down at a trot, his steed blowing loudly, as if exhausted by the pursuit.

"Halt, whoever thou art, for I am in the way," cried the mountaineer, menacingly, and the other checked his horse to a walk, but continued to advance.

Rudiger urged his own steed to a walk, repeating his warning:

"Halt or go back, I say. I have enough blood on my hands. Be warned in time."

"Hold thy hand, Rudiger," answered the voice of Rudolph, in tones of sadness rather than anger. "Is it not enough that thou hast taken my place as Lord of Schönstein but we must be foes forever? What have I done to thee that thou shouldst hate me?"

"Thou hast belied the lady of my love," was the instant answer. "Thou didst pretend to love her only to put her to shame, to drive her from her home, and now thou art her foe. Be it so; but remember that she is my wife now, and that I can defend her honor against all. Go back therefore, lest I slay thee."

Rudolph sighed heavily. "Oh, man that will not listen," he said, "tell me only this. Was I not thy true comrade of yore? Did we not sleep under the same cloak on the glaciers and did I not share my last bread with thee?"

Rudiger hesitated a moment. "It is true, and therefore I would not slay thee. Go back."

"Nay, that will I never, till I have brought thee back to the cause to which we both swore fealty. Rudiger, hast thou forgotten the Springs of Grütli?"

Again Rudiger hesitated, but again he hardened his heart.

"No cause can sanctify the persecution of a noble lady. I tell thee Bertha is my wife, and shall come back to her castle of Unterwalden as its proud mistress, if I live to fight."

"That can never be, and thou knowest it well, Rudiger. Thy heart is not with this popinjay emperor with his nobles and feasts. Thou art a mountaineer of the Rigi and thy place is with us. Come back with me and we will welcome thee."

"Now by St. Catherine of the Wheel," cried Rudiger fiercely, "how can that be? My wife is with the emperor, and he has loaded me with honors. Because thou hast left thy liege lord, am I to follow, and lose wife, honors and all, at one swoop? Nay, nay."

"Art thou sure that thou wilt not lose wife and honor as it is?" was the quiet reply of Rudolph.

Rudiger uttered a furious oath and rode right up to Rudolph with lifted mace, but the other never raised his arm.

"Smite, if thou wilt," he said. "I cannot fight thee, for reasons of which thou knowest best."

"Then tell thy meaning quickly," answered Rudiger more calmly as he lowered his mace. "What wouldst thou say against my wife?"

"Nothing but this: Go home and see if she be there. If not, find where she is."

"And where should she be?" asked Rudiger, beginning to listen in earnest at last.

"It is not for me to say aught to stain a lady's name. See for thyself. I never loved the lady nor pretended to do so. I sent her a present by thy hand, and thou sawest all that passed between us. She never loved me, though she pretended so to do. Rudiger, my old comrade, thou knowest not that I came to the Alps, heart-free, to gratify a whim of hers, because a knight must keep his word. I saw thy sister Hilda, and I loved her. She loves me and we are to be wed full soon. How, therefore, can we fight, who are brothers? Slay me with thy mace and I will not lift a hand to stay thee."

"But go home alone to thy wife, and tell her to Schönstein, or thou wilt rue the day thou didst wed her. Then hast my place, and I give it thee freely; for Hilda's love is worth all the lines of Schönstein. See that thou comest home secretly and look for thyself. Then remember that I have sworn to the men of Grütli that thou art true to us after all. Farewell."

The exiled knight, without one word of reproach, rode slowly away, leaving Rudiger alone under the stars with a new-born pain struggling at his proud heart.

He staid there for some minutes buried in bitter meditations, and then turned his horse away to proceed on his journey at a slow pace. Within half an hour after he saw before him the glimmer of the stars on the tranquil bosom of Lake Zurich, while beside him rose the conical outlines of several haystacks, showing that he had reached a farm-house. Lights were burning in a chalet near the haystacks, and the belated knight dismounted, knocked at the door and demanded hospitality for himself and his horse, feeling that otherwise he would have to proceed on foot.

The frightened peasants were too much used to the forced contributions of a state of war to refuse a man who looked as if he could take what he wanted if it were refused him; and he soon had the pleasure of seeing his faithful charger feeding on the best grain in the farm.

Refusing all offers to unarm and sleep in the house, he only waited till his animal was refreshed, when he proceeded on his way to Zurich, taking the further side of the lake—the very route Master Martin had recommended for safety.

Not for long did he pursue it, however. As soon as fairly out of hearing of the farm-house he turned into the woods, unsaddled his beast and slept till dawn in the shelter of the forest, then pursued his journey all alone.

He saw many single men who seemed to be Swiss spies and scouts, scattered throughout the country, but none of them offered to molest him, deterred by his formidable appearance; and on the morning of the third day he rode all alone into Zurich and up the narrow street to his own lodging.

The steward opened the door and started back in amazement, but Rudiger checked him with the single question:

"Where is thy lady?"

"Away at the chase, my lord," was the surprised reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

WHEN the Lady Bertha fled from the presence of the wild bear, it was with the blind instinct of physical fear, but as she galloped away she saw something else that terrified her even more.

Her path lay by a huge tree, and as she passed it she spied a tall figure in rusty armor with a huge two-handed sword, that seemed to her excited mind the form of her absent husband.

The rust on his mail was such as would come on armor after a few days' exposure to the dew and rain, and she instantly jumped to the conclusion that Rudiger had escaped his foes, had come back and had recognized her alone with the emperor.

Full of terror at this idea struck her, she plied her whip with all energy, and would have only had one thought, how to get home before him had not her eyes caught more than one lurking figure in the woods, watching her swift flight.

Once she saw a man running as if to intercept her, and another time a cross-bow bolt whizzed past her horse's flank as if some one wished to kill the animal.

Then she recognized the truth of the rumors at which the emperor had laughed in the morning, that the woods were full of Swiss spies and scouts; and she began to be quite crazy with fear.

It was in this condition of mind that she met the rest of the ladies of the train, and at once infected them and many of the men with her fears, producing thereby a precipitate flight of the whole party into Zurich.

By the time they arrived at the outskirts of the camp they began to feel comparatively safe, and the men became ashamed of their terror; but the ladies kept on till within the walls, while Bertha rode straight to her own house and galloped into the court-yard, her jennet dripping with sweat, to find the place all alive with people, merry of face and talking excitedly together.

And in the midst of the yard, with its trappings off, and two grooms polishing away at its sleek coat, stood her husband's black charger.

Bertha started and turned pale as she sat on her horse.

"Is my lord returned?" she faltered; and it was Master Martin who hurried up to her to hold her stirrup and to whisper under the cover of obsequious courtesy:

"You have been scouring the whole country for him and have sent flags to the Swiss to ransom him. Be bold, and all will be well."

Bertha, used to intrigue from her earliest years, needed no more than a hint, and she

pressed Master Martin's hand as she dismounted, as a silent signal that she understood him, then ran up the steps and into the house, crying:

"Where is my dear lord? Where is my Rudiger?"

No answer came to this appeal, and the lady was obliged to traverse the house from room to room till she found Red Rudiger at last in his bedchamber, but still in the heavy armor he had worn on his dangerous journey.

The knight turned his head to look at her as she ran in and threw herself on his breast, but did not offer to speak or put his arms round her, and she saw that his face was stern and gloomy as it had been in the days before they were married. He stood there like an iron statue, looking down on her without moving a muscle of his face, as gloomy as the grave and as silent.

But Bertha was not the sort of woman to allow herself to be quelled by the stern look of a man who she knew adored her in the bottom of his heart, so she began to twine her arms round his neck with many pretty coaxing ways, as she asked:

"What, has my lord no word for his Bertha, who has wept her eyes red for his absence, and has even now returned from searching the country for news of him? Where has my lord been all this time?"

Rudiger looked down on her as sternly as ever, but his voice had a musing, bitter tone as he answered:

"Her eyes are bright as ever. Yet she lies. Her cheek hath all its roses as of yore, and yet she lies."

Now Bertha drew away from him with a pretty assumption of being offended.

"Now never speak to me again," she pouted. "Thou art a mere jealous bear, and no true knight to thy true lady. Next time thou goest a-raiding I will put on my gayest habit and dance and sing for joy that thou hast gone. My lord has taught me a good lesson which I shall not be slow to learn."

Then she went and sat down as if she were very angry, tapping the floor with her little foot, but furtively watching him all the while. In truth she began to fear him.

Rudiger regarded her with the same gloom; gaze and presently broke the silence:

"My lady will please to tell her maidens to make ready to depart. We leave Zurich for Schönstein to night."

Bertha started slightly and began to tremble. Then with her usual facility she wept.

"Why did not my lord take me with him as I asked?" she sobbed. "Thou knowest I implored thee to do so."

His face softened slightly and he bent his head as he answered, gravely:

"It is true. Would I had done so."

"And now thou comest back, cold and strange, without one kind word for the lady that bent to lift thee, a peasant, to her own state. Oh, I am well served for loving thee. I might have known this man would prove ungrateful, because I have lost lands and riches for his sake."

Rudiger turned half toward her and made a step in her direction, then stopped, while his face began to work. Bertha saw that she was beginning to win him back and continued in the same strain, as if talking to herself:

"I have pledged all my jewels to the Jews for his ransom, and wearied the emperor night and day with my prayers to be allowed to share his prison with the Swiss, and he comes back to look on me with scorn, because he is tired of me."

Rudiger started so that his armor clashed at this observation, but then steeled himself as if to a great effort and laid his gauntleted hand on her shoulder as he asked, sternly:

"Where is the emperor, with whom thou wast hunting but this morn? Are these thy red eyes and tears? Tell me where he is."

"Alack, my lord, how should I know?" replied she, with affected surprise. "It is true that I went forth, as commanded, with the court train; but what else could I do? The emperor is our liege lord and I could not let thy wife be put aside by the wives of these imperious nobles, who sneer at thee for a low-born peasant. I am too proud of my noble lord to stay at home and let others belie him."

"Where, then, is the emperor?" asked Rudiger again; but his voice was more placable, and she was quick to catch the difference in his tone.

"God knows, my lord," she answered. "He left me in the hunt because he said I wearied him with my petitions; and that was the last I saw of him; for, as I came home, the woods were full of Swiss, and I saw a man in armor like thine, that I thought to be thy double, so I fled home like a madwoman to find thee."

"A man in armor like mine?" said Rudiger, in a tone of interest. "And was his figure like mine?"

"Ay, indeed, my lord, most like; but his armor was all rusty, as of one who had slept outdoors many a night in his harness."

Rudiger frowned and muttered:

"Rudolph again! What doth he here?"

Bertha caught at the words eagerly.

"Why did I not think of it before? It must

have been that traitor, who belied me to thee in the past, and who would do the same again. Oh, my lord, why should you listen to that false and disloyal man, who fell beneath your sword on the Rigi? He has seen you again; I am sure of it. He has poisoned your mind against me, because I despised his love for you, and now he would part us both, because he hates us."

Again Bertha wept bitterly, for she well knew her own powers. Rudiger stood hesitating, for she had attacked him on his weakest side. He had not yet forgotten the fact that Bertha had once seemed to love Rudolph, and he had much lingering hatred and suspicion of his ancient rival.

Might it not all be a cunning plan of Rudolph to throw dust in his eyes and put him out of favor with the emperor who had ennobled him? He thought it might be; and then there was Bertha, beautiful in her tears, before him, to shake his belief in anything save her.

He temporized, and then thought with triumph of an infallible test.

"Wilt thou leave this court at once and fly with me to my castle in the Tyrol?" he asked.

Immediately she sprang up, radiant, and threw her arms round his neck.

"My lord, my lord, it is all I ask," she ejaculated, "to be alone with thee for a space, to teach thee how to love me. Let us go at once."

His countenance cleared up, and for the first time he put his arms round her and looked fondly down on her.

"And is it true that thou lovest thy red wolf of the Rigi?" he asked. "And this popinjay emperor is naught to thee, save as a monarch?"

She smiled up in his face and stood on tiptoe to kiss him, saying:

"How could I care for any when thou art near! Such a man never drew sword since the days of Roland and his Paladins. Pretty faces are for women, but strong arms for a knight like thee."

The last remnant of gloom fled from the face of Red Rudiger as he listened, and he clasped her closely to his breast.

"I will trust thee," he cried aloud, "for thou hast mine honor safe. But woe betide the man that seeks to stain it!"

Bertha shuddered as she heard him, but said nothing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LORD AND VASSAL.

THE Emperor Frederick came home that day, silent and gloomy. He had begun to find out that war was not all glory, and that danger lurked even in the person of half-armed peasants.

The old margrave's precautions had saved him from possible capture or death, and he was ready to listen to that officer's suggestions, when he asked whether it would not be well to order out a strong column of horse to scour the country on either side of the lake, taking bloodhounds to track out the Swiss scouts, who lay on every hill and all through the forest.

The emperor consented, and the camp assumed an appearance of unusual stir and bustle that afternoon, as the knights armed in haste and the men-at-arms led forth their horses and prepared for their coming expedition with great glee.

The emperor himself caught the infection and began to talk of moving the army and attacking the rebels at once; from which he was only dissuaded by the prudent chamberlain, who pointed out that it were well to find out how many foes were likely to oppose them before running into danger.

Then the young monarch entered his banquetting tent and ordered a grand feast for that evening, with a tournament on the following day, after which he announced that the army would move.

Great were the rejoicings in camp at the news, for the nobles were becoming tired of inaction, and longed for an opportunity to show their prowess in battle.

It was in the midst of this bustle and excitement that the emperor was informed that Count Rudiger of Schönstein had come back from the Swiss camp and desired an audience.

Frederick started when he heard the news; his color changed a little; then he drew a deep breath as if hardening himself against a nervous fit, and said:

"Admit the gentleman."

A few moments more, and Rudiger, his armor replaced by the grave and decorous robes of a knight, entered the tent, bowed gravely to the emperor, then bent his knee with all due respect, and kissed the hand extended to him.

"Well, my lord," began Frederick, with an appearance of heartiness ill-assumed, for he was biting his lip and glancing furtively at the other, "so thou hast cheated these scurvy Swiss dogs after all, and made thy way back to us?"

"I have, my liege," was the brief reply, as the knight rose and stood before the monarch.

"And do they fight hard?" asked the young emperor, carelessly.

"They fight better than our men," answered

Rudiger, gravely; "for ours left their leader alone and theirs stood up to the battle."

Frederick frowned.

"Methinks thy heart is with these men of the cantons yet, sir knight," he said, impatiently. "I desired no praises of my rebellious subjects of thee."

"I thought your majesty asked me for the truth," replied the knight, in the same impassive tone. "It is well to know what our foes can do, lest we run into ambush unawares."

Frederick flushed scarlet. The random shot told home.

"Well, then, what dost thou wish now?" he asked, presently, as soon as he had mastered his emotion. "They told me thou hadst asked for an audience."

"I did, my liege."

"And what for?"

"To ask permission to take my wife home to Schönstein and place her there in safety, before the campaign begins in earnest."

"It begins in earnest, as thou art pleased to call it, to-morrow," was the sharp retort. "I cannot spare man or horse now, for we move on the rebels at once."

"I am glad to hear it, my liege."

The emperor looked at him with haughty surprise. Rudiger had not yet acquired the manners of a court.

"Did I crave your opinion, my lord? I think not," said the emperor, in his stiffest and coldest tones.

Rudiger bowed low.

"I crave pardon, my liege, but a soldier always joys to hear of a coming battle under a prince like Frederick of Austria."

The compliment was not bad for a novice, and Frederick smiled more placably.

"Well, well, I forgive thee. But I cannot let thee go till we have beaten these Swiss rebels."

"Then may I crave leave of my liege to send my wife home under an escort?"

"No," was the short reply.

The red knight was so unused to the ways of courtiers that he was startled into the exclamation:

"No! and why not?"

"Because I will not," cried Frederick, fiercely.

"Great Heaven, Sir Rudiger, hast thou not rubbed off the smell of the cow-stable yet? Dost thou know I, thy liege lord, give no reasons to my vassals for my actions here? Retire at once, till thou hast learned manners."

Rudiger flushed up to the temples, not so much with anger as shame, for the emperor's tone showed him that he had made a grave mistake of etiquette, and he was as sensitive as a girl on that point.

"I humbly crave my liege's pardon, and will go," was all he could stammer, as he backed toward the door; and he was about to depart in dire confusion, when the young emperor called him back with an appearance of easy kindness that did credit to his powers as an actor, saying:

"Come back, man, come back. I am not angry with thee. I will send thee away as soon as we have finished these vermin of Swiss. I know how thou lovest thy lady, and can feel for thee. To-night we have a great feast, and to-morrow we hold a tournament. Bring the lady with thee to the feast, and see that thou bear thee well at the tournament, for the man who is crowned king of the lists will have the honor to lead the advance on the Swiss lines the day after. Farewell, sir knight."

And so saying, the emperor left Rudiger to make his exit, as humble and grateful as ever, while he smiled to think how easily he had outwitted the simple knight.

But hardly had the mountaineer departed than the curtains at the back of the tent parted and Master Martin peeped in; then, seeing the emperor alone hurried up to him, knelt at his feet, and ejaculated:

"My liege, there is danger abroad. The lady sends thee this."

The emperor hastily tore open the billet the other presented, for Master Martin was a secret agent of Frederick, and his coming at any time was privileged.

The letter was in Bertha's writing, and the emperor frowned as he read it:

"MY LIEGE: If you would save my name and life, let me go to the Tyrol at once. Rudolph of Schönstein has poisoned Rudiger's mind, but I have persuaded him that he belied me. The battle comes, and he cannot live forever. Be true to thy promise to me, that our meeting may be the sweeter."

"BERTHA."

Frederick sat silent for some moments, staring gloomily at Master Martin.

At last he said, in tones as bitterly sarcastic as he could make them:

"Is this a trick by which this coy lady hopes to cheat me, and escape from my power?"

"Sire!" stammered the notary, rising in some confusion.

"I say is this a new trick by which this lady wishes to cheat me?" asked Frederick, still more harshly. "By Heaven, Master Martin, I have been deceived long enough by her. Now I bethink me, she was full ready to marry this same cow-driving knight of Schönstein. Ay, and she was full fond of him, too. She would

fly with him to the Tyrol, and for what?—to save my name and life, forsooth! Save her name! From what?"

Master Martin did not offer to answer, and Frederick went on:

"Does this lady fear my notice? Now, by the splendor of Heaven, the emperor's love is an honor for any woman in his court. Is it not so? Master Martin, is it not so?"

Master Martin bowed in his most obsequious way.

"Certainly, sire."

Indeed, Master Martin was quite sincere, and there were very few in those days who did not believe with him that the monarch was a semi-divine personage.

"Then, why," continued Frederick, "does this lady wish to flee our court with her lout of a new knight?"

"Because she fears he may kill her in his jealousy," was the deprecating reply. "This wild man of the Rigi has red hair and the temper of a chafed boar of the forest. He might, all in a moment, turn on his wife in a fit of fury to rend her. Therefore, she would remove all cause for the present, till he be tamer."

"And, by the bones of Charlemagne, I say he shall be tamed here," answered the emperor, passionately.

Again Master Martin made no reply, but stood with his eyes fixed on the ground till the emperor, in an impatient tone, burst out:

"Well, well, well, what is it? Speak thy mind, as I bid thee."

Master Martin came a little nearer, and spoke in a low, cautious tone, as if afraid of being overheard:

"My liege knows that there are many nobles of the empire who hold for Louis of Bavaria."

Frederick stirred uneasily in his seat, and frowned impatiently.

"Well, well! I know it, and as soon as I have crushed these rebels in mine own dukedom, I will settle with that pretender. The rest, sir."

Master Martin spoke still lower:

"My liege knows that Louis has offered freedom to the Swiss Cantons. Rudolph of Schönstein passed to the camp of the pretended emperor a week since."

Frederick started.

"How know you that?"

"The margrave's men saw him in the woods as we went to Schönstein to install Rudiger in his castle, and knew him by his armor, rusty though it was."

The emperor began to bite his nails and his race twitched.

"Then it must have been he that spoke to me to-day," he muttered, thoughtfully. "What a fool was this knight not to slay me as I was alone."

Master Martin seemed surprised.

"Did your majesty see him?"

"Yes, I saw him to-day."

But the emperor did not seem to be inclined to tell more and sat in deep thought for some minutes. At last he asked:

"Well, what has this to do with sending away the lady?"

"This, sire. If she be sent away it is easy to get rid of this Rudiger. If he be allowed to lead the assault, the chances are many that he will be killed and your majesty will resume the fief of Schönstein with the widow of Rudiger. It may be she will stay a widow, and yet it would seem that there are prudent and discreet men among your majesty's servants who might be trusted to act as a widow's protector."

Frederick stared at the notary in silence for a minute and then said with the dryest of accents:

"Meaning Master Martin by chance? Is it so?"

"It might be. Any one that your majesty pleased," was the wily answer. "A reward for long and faithful service is a thing to be granted by favor not demanded."

The emperor burst out laughing.

"Now by the fame of Rudolph my grandsire, thou art bold, sir, and I like thy spirit. Suppose that I send the lady to Schönstein under thy guard, would it suit thee?"

Master Martin bowed low.

"Your majesty's orders are laws not to be disobeyed. I would see that the lady forgot not her duty to her liege lord, and I am discreet."

Frederick rose from his chair with more cheerfulness than he had yet shown.

"The lady shall go. After all, a woman in camp hampers the spirits of a knight. Tell the good margrave I would see him, and so farewell, Master Martin."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TOURNAMENT.

BRIGHT and clear dawned the next day over the fair city of Zurich and saw the lists set in the midst of the camp, while throngs of brightly-armed knights were making their horses curvet and wind to and fro outside, to supple them for the great contest.

Rudiger of Schönstein, his stern face unusually cheerful, was conspicuous among them all, his imposing figure appearing to great advantage on the powerful and docile charger to

which he had become so much attached. Without being devoid of spirit, it was very easy in its paces, and Rudiger felt that he would have a great advantage in the *melée* on account of his size and strength, lances being barred out and the knights confined to swords, axes and maces.

He felt unusually cheerful on more than one account. The emperor had been very gracious to him at the banquet the night before, and had given him free leave to send his wife home under an escort, with Master Martin to act as a safe steward for the property till the army should break up and go home again.

Bertha, on being told of this arrangement, had wept bitterly at the idea of being parted from her husband, and had shown him so much affection that the knight proposed that Bertha should stay after all, and would have asked the emperor to excuse this change of mind had not the lady warned him that it was against etiquette.

"No, my lord," she said, still weeping, "if it must be so, it must. I will pray for thy safety in the battle, and thou wilt have no cause to be jealous of thy true lady, cooped up in a moldy old castle, with none but mice and owls to keep her company."

She said this with a pretty pout; and Rudiger could find no words to answer save those of coaxing. And now the morning had come; the train of retainers was formed to ride away with Bertha, headed by the discreet Master Martin.

Rudiger, full of the excitement of the tournament, felt a strange sense of relief at the coming departure of the wife whom he loved so fondly, but who had already brought him so much trouble.

Now the trumpets sounded and the knights took their places in the lists in two parties, one headed by the emperor himself, the other by the old Margrave of Brandenburg, who was styled a "rough jousting," though he had nearly attained the age of fifty-four.

In the margrave's party rode Rudiger, and as soon as the trumpets sounded away went the two lines, to meet with a clash and shock in the center of the lists.

By special request of the emperor, the Lady Bertha had been induced to delay her departure till the fate of the tournament was decided, for the young monarch was very vain of his prowess as a horseman, and wished her to see him in the lists.

He had made up his mind to please her by a public victory over Rudiger, for in the lists there was no respect of persons, and the mightiest of monarchs did not disdain to bandy blows with any of their subjects without the latter feeling bound to give way.

This was theoretically true in the institutes of chivalry, but practically few knights would have ventured to get the best of an emperor in public.

The emperor, knowing how raw was his new-made knight in horsemanship, and being himself an accomplished cavalier, thought that he would have an easy victory over Rudiger.

He was within an inch as tall as the big mountaineer, and weighed at least as much, though his gracefully rounded limbs gave more indications of fat than the brawny, muscular members of Rudiger.

As soon as the *melée* therefore had begun, and after the first shock, Frederick the Handsome turned his gray charger and rushed straight at Rudiger, wielding a bright battle-ax with spike and double head.

He found the burly knight at bay in the midst of a circle of others who were striking at him with singular unanimity, for his sudden elevation had procured him any number of secret foes, and a tournament was the best of places to vent old grudges.

Some men, even of his own party, had joined in the onset against him, and the clash of swords was all round.

Nothing then saved Rudiger but his enormous personal strength and the size and weight of his horse.

Few of his foes were able to use anything heavier than a sword, a weapon almost innocuous against the strong plate armor of the fourteenth century.

He himself carried nothing but a staff about four feet long, which bore on its head a great iron ball set with spikes, a weapon that bore the quaint name of "Guten dag" or "Good day"; just as the Swiss mace, which differed from it only in having the ball attached to the staff by a chain, was called a "Morgenstern" or "Morning Star."

This mace had one great advantage in a confused *melée*, that it had no flat side, as did swords and axes, and wherever it fell it dented the heaviest armor.

Already three knights had gone down before it, stunned in spite of their helmets, when the emperor dashed into the *melée*, crying:

"Shame, shame! Leave him to me!"

But even in crying shame on the men who attacked another ten to one, the emperor took a mean advantage in his own person, by dashing up against Rudiger's big charger sidewise, and striving to get his foot under the other's heel so as to tip him out of the saddle.

At the same moment the young monarch dealt from behind a furious blow at his enemy's helmet, which fell fair upon it, but with the flat of the ax instead of its edge.

Rudiger felt the blow and bent over his saddle-bow for an instant with a dizzy sense, while the emperor continued to crowd his horse sidewise against the other charger, to overthrow it.

All would have been over for the new-made knight, had not unexpected help appeared.

A tall knight in the colors of the House of Brandenburg, but with a lithe vigor of frame that showed he was not the old margrave, sent his own horse, with a skillful touch of rein and spur, on the other side of Rudiger's charger, jostling close in as if accidentally, and thus supporting the surprised and staggering animal.

This little help gave Rudiger time to recover from the shock of the emperor's first blow, for Frederick was now so busy "passaging" his horse, in the hope of overthrowing the other, that he had not repeated his first effort.

Rudiger rose up in his saddle, the mace still hanging from his wrist by the chain where he had dropped it in his first dizzy fit; and with the blind instinct of battle dealt the emperor a back-handed buffet with his clenched left fist, full on the visor.

So powerful was the blow that it knocked the other's head back, and gave Rudiger another breathing space, during which his horse gave a desperate bound and bolted out from between the others.

The Brandenburg knight turned his horse away into the *melée* and disappeared as soon as he saw that Rudiger was not any longer overmatched, and the red knight caught up his mace again and rushed at the emperor.

He recognized him well enough, but he had also caught a glimpse of Bertha through the bars of his helmet, for they were close under the balcony where she sat.

She was looking eagerly down, and in a moment the whole significance of the emperor's sudden and treacherous attack flashed on his mind.

"He wishes a fight before her. He shall have it," muttered the mountaineer, through his clinched teeth, and with that he dug in his spurs and went straight at his liege lord.

Frederick, on his part, met him with equal fury, and for a moment they exchanged blows with all their might, neither thinking of parry or evasion.

The emperor was sustained by his pride, and confident of his superior skill on horseback, and did not deign to exert any craft in the first few moments, while Rudiger, who felt only too keenly his own shortcomings when not on firm ground, was resolved to end the battle quickly by main strength.

It took but a few blows to show Frederick that he was overmatched, for he felt the steel of his helmet beaten on his head by the first blow, while the second made him reel in his saddle, his own blows failing of effect from the turning of his weapon in his hand.

With the third blow he dropped his battle-ax by the chain, and fell forward, dizzy and stunned; and a fourth was just descending to knock him out of the saddle, when the same Brandenburg knight, who had before saved Rudiger, came galloping down between the combatants with a shout, and with wonderful skill sent both horses reeling away from each other by the blow of his own charger's shoulders.

There was just room to do it, and no more, and a moment sooner or later would have insured his own fall. As it was, the emperor fell off his horse on one side, and Rudiger, who had overbalanced himself by his last blow, on the other, while both chargers ran away.

Before the fallen prince could rise, Rudiger had sprung up and strode over toward him, worked up to a blind fighting frenzy, with lifted mace, when a general shout of warning and alarm arose, as a crowd of knights rode down between them.

"This is no fight to the death," cried the old margrave to Rudiger. "Hold thy hand. Thou hast done enough for thine honor. Beware lest it prove too much."

Then Rudiger drew back with a faint sense of having committed another breach of etiquette, and looked up at the balcony, beneath which he stood.

Bertha, pale but smiling, was looking down at him, and as he gazed she kissed her hand gayly, then turned away to leave the lists, followed by her retinue.

But the tournament was over.

The rude mountaineer had indeed committed another breach of court etiquette, for he had knocked the emperor senseless, and the knights had left their fighting to crowd around their fallen monarch.

And Rudiger, as he walked away to look after his runaway horse, had a dim sort of idea that he had incurred a new danger by his victory.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MARCH.

THE midday sun shone down on Lake Zurich, and the air was all quivering with heat; while

the dust on the road to Zug rose in thick white clouds for many a mile.

Long rumbling trains of heavy wagons occupied the main track, followed by strings of pack-horses and mules, in a dense mass, for nearly ten miles; for the whole of the army of the emperor was on the move, with all its pavilions and furniture packed away; its gold and silver plate reposing in the chests.

Besides the ordinary baggage of the army, which was enormous, there was an equally large convoy of provisions and forage for the thirty thousand mailed horsemen who constituted its main body and were all that were then deemed worthy of a name in counting forces.

In our days thirty thousand men is far from being a large army. It may even be called a small one. But in the fourteenth century thirty thousand lances meant more than a hundred thousand mouths to feed in archers, light horse, camp-followers and grooms; while the stock of beasts to be found in fodder mounted above even these figures.

The Austrian army was in fact a perfect swarm of locusts, so far as eating up every green thing in the land was concerned, and they had done it pretty effectually before they traveled from Zurich toward Zug to find the Switzers.

Far in advance of them all, beyond the scouts that the Margrave of Brandenburg had sent forward to spy out the country, rode a single horseman in the colors of the House of Brandenburg worn as a surcoat over his armor. He was followed at a little distance by a second man, dressed in leather, and carrying a cross-bow. This second man, whose black hair and comical dark face could be those of no other but Max Brugg, was mounted on a small mule, so short that the legs of its rider were not six inches off the ground, but so sturdy and strong that it seemed fully able to carry Max.

The two companions went at a trot down every hill and over every level, but invariably kept in the woods at the roadside and moved slowly when climbing hills.

At the top of each eminence they halted, dismounted, and looked back into the country behind them, which fell away from Zug to Zurich in a regular succession of foothills and valleys.

Thus the two had a perfect view of the advance of the Austrians all day long; without any danger for themselves, and could survey at leisure the white tilts of the wagons, the dark mass of the pack train, the gleaming serpent-like column of mailed horsemen in front of all, with the clouds of cross-bowmen and light horse that spread all over the country on either flank, and the few men in the advance as scouts.

Black Max looked grave and thoughtful as he surveyed the vast mass of his foes from one of these hills, and spoke out to the armed cavalier, his companion:

"There are a vast many of them, White Rudolph; enough to eat us all up as if we were sheep."

Rudolph, for it was none other than that knight of the many disguises, smiled cheerfully and hopefully as he answered:

"Thou knowest, Max, that the priest tells us how God defends the right. Be not afraid."

"Oh, as far as that goes, I'll stand up and fight them till slain," replied the bluff mountaineer, heartily; "but we may as well make up our minds to let the Austrians have the country, after we're all dead."

"Even that would be a gain, Max, for we should not have to live and see our women and children in bonds to them."

Max started, flushed crimson, and ground his teeth as the other said "women and children." The thought seemed to strike him for the first time.

"Nay, 'fore Heaven, I know one woman who will not live to be a slave," he answered, hotly.

"Thou meanest Elsa of Melchthal. And I know another, my wife."

Rudolph said the last words with an accent of proud fondness, for he had married Hilda on the day he had returned from his secret visit to Louis of Bavaria; and Max, in the philosophical spirit native to his disposition, had consoled himself by falling in love with Elsa of Melchthal, who seemed well disposed to respond to his suit.

"Yes, Max," continued the exiled knight, "it may be that these men are strong enough to crush the Switzers by sheer weight of numbers; but they will gain nothing but a field sown with dead bodies, their own comrades not the smallest part of the slain."

Max sighed and shrugged his shoulders, for his merry humor did not chime in with such gloomy thoughts.

"Well, well, it can't be helped now," he said. "Though, if some of us at Grütli had known what was coming to us, we might have hesitated before we burned all the castles. They might have proved useful now, to stand off these fellows."

Rudolph smiled.

"We took them easily enough, and we should have been no safer in them than their first owners. The battle will be decided by brave hearts and strong arms, and we have those on our side."

"But we can't kill all these people," retorted

Max, rather ruefully, as he waved his hand over the moving host below him.

"We shall not need to," was the quiet reply. "One runaway is as good as two dead men, for he sets others running."

Max rubbed his nose wisely.

"I don't know that I quite understand what you mean," he observed.

"Just this, my friend. The only men in that great array who can be depended on to fight are the knights and men-at-arms. The rest will look on! If the others break us, the rabble will rush in and do the plundering. If they are broken and run, the rabble will run, too. That is all."

"But how can we break them?" asked Max. "They are thirty thousand men on horses, and we have not a horse, save thine, fit to carry a mailed man."

"If they would keep in the open field, sweep the villages and make us fight them where they wished, we were lost men indeed," answered Rudolph; "but thou forgettest that they have a young and haughty leader, who will come and attack us where we wish, in the hope of crushing us by main force. On the slope of the Morgarten a horseman is lost who tries to ride up; and there will we wait for them."

"But suppose they will not come that way?" asked Max, who began to have some glimmering of the abstruse science of strategy, not much understood in the middle ages. "Suppose they pass by and leave us there, while they go on between Zug and Kussnacht, or round to Unterwalden, burning and destroying, with none to stay them?"

"In that case," answered Rudolph, with a smile, "we should wait till night, and then come down on their wagon-train, burning all they have to eat, while they are away. Which, think you, would be the worst off, then; they, with a hundred thousand hungry mouths and naught to feed them, or we, living at our ease in the enemy's camp, while our women and children are safe upon the Alps, with no loss but a burnt cottage to repair?"

Max nodded his head, gravely.

"There is something in that," he admitted. "They would all starve to death, or have to run home in haste to get something to eat. I never thought of that."

"But, we shall not need to do that," continued Rudolph, confidently. "I have not been in and out of the camp of these proud nobles so often without learning something. The emperor will attack us, for he hopes to crush us at a blow. It is only hunting our army out; I will do him the grace to believe that he disdains to war on women and children. He will come to us and fight us, wherever we will. Come; they are getting too near. Let us trot on a little. They are crowning yonder hill."

"Not so," replied Max, whose keen black eyes had been trained on many a long chamois hunt. "They are going into camp again. Fore Heaven, if they make every day's work like this, it will be a week ere they reach our camp at Morgarten; though Rudiger came to us in one day, the red-headed traitor!"

Honest Max, with all his respect for his comrade's superior learning, and that mysterious charm which resides for the vulgar in noble blood, could not be got to share his companion's lenient views of Rudiger's conduct, and always spoke harshly of him.

Rudolph looked long and earnestly at the head of the column, which had, as he said, crowned the hill opposite to them, and discovered that Max was right. The horsemen had halted there, and were dismounting; while the long procession of wagons and mules was hurrying up into a dense mass, in the midst of a thick and heavy cloud of dust.

After a close inspection he saw the emperor's banner planted on the summit of the hill, while tents began to rise like magic round it; and, although he could at first hardly believe his eyes, he became satisfied at last that the Austrians were content with about ten miles for a day's journey of mounted men, and were actually going into camp.

No sooner was he satisfied of this, than he said, hurriedly:

"Go thou back and tell Walter Furst where they are encamped, that he may bring out his men this way to-morrow, and coax them on. I will go down once more into their midst, and find what has caused this sudden halt."

Max nodded and went off on his mule, while Rudolph deliberately rode down toward the enemy's camp.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SPY.

WHEN Rudolph of Schönstein took his way to the Austrian camp he had no very clear idea of how he should enter it without discovery. As long as the emperor lay at Zurich the matter had been comparatively easy, for no guard was kept on the camp and the Swiss had come and gone freely, in the guise of market-men with poultry and vegetables for sale, shepherds and drovers and what not.

At the tournament also he had no difficulty in entering with his visor down, by the simple precaution of covering his armor with a sur-

coat bearing the colors of the House of Brandenburg; and in that disguise had interfered to prevent the defeat of Red Rudiger on one side and the probable death of the emperor on the other.

This last exploit, however, had attracted so much attention to him that he had found it necessary to make his way out of the lists as quietly as possible for fear of too close questioning, and had ever since been hovering on the outskirts of the army, in concert with the watchful Swiss spies, overseeing every movement of his foes.

Thinking over some means of entering the enemy's camp, now that they were on the march and likely to have a regular chain of guards round them, he rode into the woods at the side of the road, skirted some hills and came on a group of Swiss cross-bowmen lying hidden in the brush watching the enemy.

These men welcomed him silently for they knew him well, and he asked them what they had seen of the halt and what part of the enemy was then opposite to them.

He learned that a heavy mass of cross-bowmen was camped on that side composed of Genoese mercenaries, with a few Germans from the Tyrol.

Instantly Rudolph formed his resolution to enter camp as a cross-bowman, and to pass himself off as a German on the Genoese and as a Genoese on the Germans, so as to avoid the risk of betrayal by mistakes of language among those who spoke it well.

The quick-witted Swiss took the idea readily and one of them was soon found to change clothes and arms with the stately knight, after which Rudolph started boldly out of the bushes.

His men had been lying within three hundred yards of the flank of the Genoese camp, above a spring where the men came to get water, and Rudolph found it easy to come out of the woods and mingle with the men of various companies who were roaming about, as if he too had strayed from his command in the general looseness of discipline.

Contrary to his fears he was not even spoken to by the Genoese, for his light hair proclaimed him a Teuton and the Italians kept apart from the Germans with instinctive antipathy.

He traversed the whole Genoese camp without difficulty, and saw the tents of the German cross-bowmen before him, among which he recognized with a strange feeling of mingled pleasure and pain the cognizance of his own house, the wild boar of the Tyrol.

Now came the question how to pass through here without being discovered and here the luck which had hitherto favored the knight still stood him in service.

He saw that by a little circuit through the Genoese camp he could pass the German cross-bowmen and get in among the horse-boys and "couteliers" that swarmed around the outskirts of the mounted knights and men-at-arms.

A little later he was lost among these fellows, and though he had to run the gantlet of a good deal of rough slang as to being out of his own camp he felt safe from detection and pursued his way toward the banner that marked from afar the emperor's head-quarters.

The nearer he came to this the greater became his risk of discovery now that it was still broad daylight; and he was glad to perceive at a little distance from him a crowd of people gathered round a herald, who was reading a proclamation, thus giving him a plausible excuse to be found in that part of the camp.

He mingled dextrously with the crowd, among which were stragglers from every arm of the service, and heard the herald read out orders that the whole camp should be struck at daybreak next day, when they were to march on the Morgarten, where the Swiss army was waiting them with the impious presumption of traitors doomed by Heaven to sure and swift destruction.

The exiled noble smiled to himself as he listened, for his predictions were verified; and he heard with some interest the comments of the bystanders.

"We'll spit them on our lances like rabbits for the cook," said a big man-at-arms from Bohemia.

"Unless the cowards run away we shall have rare fun to-morrow."

"What a pity they are such poor, scurvy wretches," remarked a *coutelier*. "The plunder will not be worth taking after all our pains."

"No. We must wait for plunder till we have got through here and go back to fight the other emperor at Nuremberg," cried a Tyrolese cross-bowman, whom Rudolph recognized as the retainer of a baron whose possessions bordered his own late domain.

"What a strange thing it is to have two emperors, and not know which is the right one," sapiently observed the Bohemian man-at-arms. "In old times it was easy to tell, for the Pope always crowned the true one; but now he will crown neither, and leaves them to fight it out with their own arms as best they may."

Rudolph thought he had heard enough of this sort of stuff, and began to fear that the Tyrolese might recognize him, so he edged away,

following the crowd that accompanied the herald on his pilgrimage, and thus traversing quite unnoticed the greater part of the camp, learning the location of all parts, and finally bringing up at the rear of the emperor's head-quarters.

Here he lounged about among the horse-boys and others, for some time seeking an opportunity to learn something more of importance, till he suddenly came almost running up against Red Rudiger, who was busied in earnest conversation with a monk in the Carmelite habit.

For a moment Rudolph thought all was over, and even his bronzed cheek turned pale.

True, Rudiger did not appear to see him, for his eyes were bent on the ground, his face was abstracted in stern thoughtfulness, and he seemed to be unaware of his surroundings.

But the case was different with the monk. Him Rudolph knew in a moment as the old father-confessor of Schönstein who had known him from a boy; and Father Hilary stared him full in the face in a way that showed that he recognized him.

But that was all. The two passed on still buried in conversation, and Rudolph could not tell for the life of him whether the monk meant to betray him or not.

By one of those flashes of intelligence which come to resolute men in the midst of danger, Rudolph determined to follow them and find out the truth as to this.

He reasoned to himself:

"Father Hilary knows and loves me, and had he wished to betray me, he would have only had to direct Rudiger's attention to me. Not having done that he will probably help me. I will follow on the risk of it, for I am in his power as it is, and I cannot escape now unless he chooses to let me."

So saying, he took off his steel cap and let down part of his long hair over his eyes, grimed his face hastily with clay and then followed the pair, as they proceeded toward Rudiger's tent.

This structure was set up very near to the emperor's head-quarters, and Rudolph thought that he could divine the reason in the suspicion and jealousy with which the young monarch regarded this rough mountain hunter, who had by such a wonderful piece of luck gained the hand of the most beautiful woman in court, and yet seemed unwilling to be blinded to the advances made by the emperor to his wife.

Rudolph, brought up from childhood among the licentious nobles of the Austrian court, knew but too well the shameful facility with which the highest ladies would answer the proffered love of the lord paramount of feudal society even at the cost of their own honor, and he knew that it would take the most skillful management on the part of the emperor's followers to keep the high-spirited mountaineer forever in ignorance of the treason by which he was surrounded.

He judged also, from the stern and preoccupied expression of Rudiger's face, as he talked with the good old priest, that his suspicions, so often stilled, had been roused again.

Curious to know what was passing he followed them and caught a few words from the monk, who was doing all the conversation, Rudiger saying nothing, but listening sternly.

"My lord must not be rash. There may be nothing in the letter, but what an honorable lady might write to her sovereign—"

That was all he was able to catch, and then the pair disappeared in the count's tent, and Rudolph found himself free to depart if he so wished.

But the few words he had heard had made a great impression on him, and he determined to hear more if it were possible.

Glancing around him, he saw that nobody was near the tent, the herald having attracted most of the camp-followers after him.

In a moment he had glided to the rear of the tent and threw himself down on the ground under a pile of horse equipments which lay there as luck would have it almost on the edge of the tent.

There he covered himself up perfectly screened from view, and with his head close to the tent could hear all that passed within.

The voice of Father Hilary struck his attention first.

"How is my lord sure that this letter is from the Lady Bertha? It may not be. As my lord says, he is no clerk; and I, though I read, know not the lady's hand."

Rudolph heard an impatient groan from within and then Rudiger answered:

"Alas, father, it is true I am no clerk, but she herself taught me to know the way she wrote her name, and I know too well her seal, the seal of Unterwalden, a crown under a tree. The letter is hers and I saw it drop from his breast as he turned away from me after giving me my orders."

"And did not my lord fear to pick it up in the emperor's own tent?" asked Father Hilary, in wonder.

"I fear nothing but dishonor," was the haughty reply. "Let me once know for certain that he has dared to stain *that*, and the crown of the Cæsars shall not save him from me."

Rudolph listened with the utmost intentness now but heard not a word, for nearly a minute. The monk seemed to be dumfounded and uncertain what to do or say.

Presently Rudolph heard him ask:

"And what is my lord's will?"

"That thou read me this letter on thy oath as a priest before the bar of the Almighty to tell truly every word that it holds."

Rudolph could not see the face of the speaker, but the tones were so harsh, deep and guttural that he knew Rudiger must be laboring under strong excitement.

"I can do it, if my lord is resolved," answered Father Hilary, hesitatingly, "but it seems that 'twould be best to wait till we see the lady and ask her to explain the matter, before reading a letter that belongs to our liege lord the emperor."

Rudiger laughed a harsh discordant laugh and retorted:

"What! Hath she schooled thee already to take her part? Man, I dare not see her till I am sure, for there is a coaxing twining serpent in her that will wind round my heart and foil me of every doubt and purpose. I will not see her. Read me the letter."

"My lord knows that the lady is at least, safe now," urged Father Hilary. "She is doubtless in the castle ere this, and surely she cannot see the emperor there."

Again Rudiger laughed, but still more sardonically.

"And so, if she continues in the right way after this, perhaps I should forgive her and let the past bury its own dead. Is it so, father?"

The monk made no answer, and Rudiger continued in a low, grating voice of extreme excitement:

"Now I know that thou suspectest harm in this letter. I have heard of this matter before, not once nor twice, but twenty times, from friends and foes, and finally from the man I hate above all others, this Rudolph, whose place I have. No more words, father, but read that letter, and then beware lest thou drop one word, syllable or letter, for by the glory of the Virgin 'twill be worse for thee if thou dost. Read, I say."

"I will read, my son, and on thy head be the sin," said Father Hilary.

"Be it so," was the reply.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LETTER.

WITH an unconquerable instinct of curiosity, Rudolph of Schönstein turned over on his side, lifted the pendent border at the bottom of the tent, and looked in.

He saw Rudiger standing with his back to him, in full armor, looking down on the monk, who sat on a chest, with a folded paper in his hands, which he was slowly opening.

Softly, and without disturbing the occupants of the tent, the daring knight let the flap fall all round his face, which was close to one of the tent pegs, and lay there in full view of all that passed, but quite unseen unless one should search for him.

Father Hilary was a long time in unfolding the paper, and pretended great difficulty in deciphering the characters, but at last he began to read in a low voice and Rudolph heard every word.

"My liege," read Father Hilary, slowly, "if you would save my name and life, let me go to the Tyrol at once. Rudolph of Schönstein has poisoned Rudiger's mind, but I have persuaded him that he belied me."

"Ay," broke in the red knight, in the same deep tones of suspicion and repressed anger that he had used all through the interview; "she had done so, that very morn. Are devils ever formed like angels, father? She is—but go on; read all."

Father Hilary resumed his reading in the same low, grave voice, as if he were impressed with the duty he was performing. Very slowly came from his lips the next words:

"The battle comes and he cannot live forever."

Rudiger drew his breath hard in a sort of gasp.

"Read that again," he muttered.

Father Hilary complied, and the knight shuddered all over and cowered down in his seat as if he had received a mortal blow.

"She longs for my death," he whispered, as if in soliloquy; "and I would have given ten lives to save her one moment's pain."

Then he turned harshly and abruptly on Father Hilary, as if stung by some sudden thought, and growled out:

"Go on! Finish! What next?"

Father Hilary read out:

"Be true to thy promise to me, that our meeting may be the sweeter."

"Now by the flames of the bottomless pit!" came forth from Rudiger's cavernous chest in a whisper of passion too intense to find other utterance; "they shall have a happy meeting of it all! Go on."

"That is all," answered the monk, in a low voice.

"All!"

"All but the superscription."

"Then read that," said Rudiger, in the same harsh tones.

Slowly, and more reluctantly than ever, the monk read out:

"To the most mighty lord, Frederick of Hapsburg, of the Most Holy Roman Empire Caesar Augustus."

"Then, father, who wrote that letter to the emperor?" demanded Rudiger, pale to the lips.

Father Hilary hesitated, and at last answered slowly:

"A lady named Bertha. That is all we can tell for a truth."

"And this Bertha hath a lord named Rudiger, whose mind hath been poisoned by one Rudolph of Schönstein," pursued Rudiger, with the manner of one who would leave no loophole for escape.

"So it seems from the letter," replied the monk, reluctantly.

"Then, father, who wrote it?"

"It would seem, indeed, it was was the Countess Bertha," admitted Father Hilary, still more reluctantly, "but even then she may not be guilty—"

"It would be strange, father," interrupted Rudiger, unceremoniously, "if it comports with the duty of an honorable lady to write thus in secret to her emperor. 'The battle comes and he cannot live forever. Be true to thy promise.' This truly is a letter that will not strictly tally with mine honor, coming from my wife to another man. 'Our meeting shall be sweeter.' Yes, forsooth, it is possible that she may not be guilty! These are the words of honorable ladies to their kings—eh, Father Hilary?"

The poor old monk could only hang his head, and made no reply, while Rudiger continued:

"First I hear it from Master Martin, who is drunk, and prattles in his cups. He told the truth, and I did not believe him. Afterward he lied to me, and I believed him. He hath yet to suffer for the lie. Next came Rudolph, and I believed him for a space, till she made me doubt all; but, now—now—I know."

The last words were spoken in tones of intense fury, and Father Hilary was so much impressed by the fiery, bloodshot eyes of his new lord, that he started up, all in a tremble, and put out his hands, as if he expected a blow.

The sight of his gray hairs sobered the angry knight in a moment, and he extended his own hand kindly, saying:

"Nay, nay, fear not. I would not harm thee, father. Thou hast not lied to me."

He turned away as if to calm himself, and paced up and down the tent in silence, till Father Hilary ventured to ask him:

"And what said our poor exiled lord, Rudolph? Was he well, my lord? Pardon me, but we all loved him, you know."

Rudiger laughed bitterly.

"Yes, yes, I know. You love him as you hate me. Even she loved him, and he cared no more for her than for a kitchen-wench. Why, father, but for him, I should never have saved her, and so become her husband. Oh, Rudolph, this adds one more to the debt I owe thee. Thou hast brought me to dishonor. I have spared thy life once. Beware the next time."

Father Hilary's face flushed, and he rose up with a new dignity in his mien.

"Nay, nay, my lord," he said. "This is most unjust. Is it not enough that thou hast taken his place, but thou must blame him for others' deeds? What has he done to harm you, my lord?"

Rudiger was in that furious and unreasonable frame of mind that he was ready to fight all mankind, and he growled out his sullen answer:

"No matter. He stole her heritage, and he hath told my shame abroad in the enemy's camp. He dies for it."

"But not by your hand, my lord; not by your hand," interrupted Father Hilary, warmly.

Rudiger turned his bloodshot eyes on the monk in sullen surprise, as he demanded:

"And why not? Can I rest in my lordship while he lives?"

"He will not disturb you," was the grave reply, "for he knows somewhat that none else but God and I know about you."

Rudiger's face grew calmer and assumed an expression of wonder.

"And what is this somewhat of which you speak, father?" he asked, slowly.

"That the same blood flows in both your veins," was the solemn reply. "For, as the Lord liveth, Rudolph and Rudiger are brothers to each other."

Red Rudiger recoiled and stared at Father Hilary for some moments without speaking.

Then he whispered:

"Say that again."

"I say that, as God liveth, thou and Rudolph are brothers," answered the old monk, steadily.

Rudiger still stared at him in a dazed, bewildered sort of way, and presently swept his hand over his forehead.

"She told the emperor so," he muttered, gloomily; "and I did not believe her. It cannot be. My mother was Hilda Stauff, and my sister Hilda still dwells in the house where my father died, and where we lived as orphans since I was a boy. Thou darest, man."

"I dream not," answered Father Hilary, in the same steady tone. "Thy father was Rudiger of Schönstein, called the Wicked, and thy mother was the unhappy Lady Uprica von Hutten, whom he stole from a convent and carried off to his castle. Heaven smote him for the deed, my son, of which thou wast the most unhappy fruit. Thy mother died when thou wast but an hour old, and thy father had no good fortune from that day till the lightning struck him down, as he rode in a mountain pass in his armor, and left him a crippled and helpless burden for the few months that he still lingered."

The old monk paused here as if to collect his scattered memories, and Rudiger muttered to himself:

"It was true, then; and I owe my father naught but my curse."

Father Hilary held up his hands in horror.

"Blaspheme not," he cried. "Oh, my son, if thou couldst only see how like thou art to him now, in his worst and maddest days, thou wouldst not say those bitter words. He repented his sin, and did his best to atone to thee for the wrong done thee in an evil hour. Thy brother—"

"Ay, tell me of him," eagerly cried Rudiger. "Where was this lawfully born brother of me, the lawless waif, the outcast cursed from his birth?"

"Be that for me to tell," said a sad voice beside them; and into the tent through the open door walked the exiled Rudolph himself, still in his rough archer's dress.

Red Rudiger stared at him in silence, the blood streaks in his eyes growing prominent, as Rudolph threw down his arbalest and stood before them both, unarmed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BROTHERS.

"My brother," was the simple but touching greeting of Rudolph, "wilt thou not even give me thy hand?"

"Not yet," was the dry reply; "not till I hear how much of hate or love I owe thee, my lawful brother."

The savage emphasis laid on the word "lawful" showed how deep had the iron entered into the soul of Red Rudiger.

Rudolph sighed deeply, and then looked sadly but firmly into the bloodshot eyes of his brother.

"Thou owest me naught but justice and a fair hearing. Wilt thou listen to what I say?"

"Speak on," was the answer, as hard and gloomy as ever.

"I will. Rudiger, I am thy brother, not by one mother, but by the same father. My mother was dead ere thou wast born, and therefore I have taken no rights of thine from thee, for I am the elder."

"Is it so?" was the only answer of Red Rudiger. "Speak on, my elder lawful brother, for thou art the head of the house."

"I was but a little child when our father died, and Father Hilary was my governor. Thanks to him, I am one who can read and write my own tongue."

"And I but a bear with a taint on my birth, that I had no power to prevent."

Rudolph threw up his head with a proud movement.

"Who told thee to belie thy father? Not I, not Father Hilary. He said truly that our father repented of his wrong and did his best to repair it. Father Hilary himself went to Rome to ask of the Holy Father a dispensation for the marriage, and it was granted by the Pope, whose successor has just crowned Louis of Bavaria Caesar of the holy Roman empire."

Rudiger's face altered.

"Louis crowned by the Pope!" he ejaculated.

"Then what is Frederick of Austria?"

"A pretender and a rebel."

"And thou sayest that Father Hilary secured—"

"A dispensation from thy mother's vows, whom I then wed fast to Rudiger of Schönstein," interrupted the monk himself, who had been watching them with much interest.

"And was I, then, born in lawful wedlock?" asked Rudiger, in a low tone.

"Thou wast," replied his brother.

"Then how came I to be known as Rudiger Stauff?" asked the mountaineer, suspiciously.

"I never knew till a year since," answered Rudolph. "I was brought up in ignorance that I had ever had a brother, for even the peasants round us knew it not. Thou wast sent out as a babe to nurse at the cottage of Ernest Stauff, who consented to bring thee up as his son and let no one know thy true name, save that by baptism."

"And why was this? Was I not as good as thee, to be brought up as a knight should be? This, then, is a boon I owe my father, I suppose."

Rudiger's face had been softening before this, but now it was as hard and bitter as ever.

"Not so," interposed Father Hilary, in a grave tone. "If thou wilt curse the mother that bore thee, do so; but it was her dying wish that thou shouldst not know thy true

birth till thou hadst attained years of manhood."

"Again, why?" asked Rudiger, in the same sullen tone.

"That none might cast shame on thee for her sins. Now thou and I know the truth. Thy brother knew naught of it till a year ago, and what did he then? He sought thee out, at the wish of his father, written out and left in my hands, to give thee the choice of coming to the Tyrol as a younger brother, with a slur on thy name that none could help, or of remaining a free and honest born mountaineer, whom none knew save as the lawful son of an honest farmer."

Rudiger folded his arms and began to pace the tent gloomily.

"Go on," he said, presently, in a stifled voice. "I would hear all. Tell me what thou didst, brother."

Rudolph's face brightened a little, for Rudiger's voice was kinder than before. He went on with his story; and as he proceeded the tent gradually darkened; for the evening began to close in on them.

"As soon as Father Hilary read me the letter my dying father had dictated to be read at my manhood, I went to the Rigi to seek thee. I had two objects in going there, and I beg thee to listen calmly, for one nearly concerns thy wife, Bertha."

Rudiger shuddered slightly, but compressed his lips as he muttered:

"Go on. I will listen."

"I had met the lady at a tournament in Vienna, where I soon found her to be frivolous, heartless and cruel. It was her sport to set brave knights fighting to the death for her colors, and she flung away their hearts as they had been but clouds of dirt. It was my fortune to win the prize at the tournament, and I had heard from a lady of the court how the fair Bertha had lightly wagered her glove against a cast of hawks that she would make me kill myself for love of her ere long. I knew her beauty and my own weakness, and I fled Vienna lest I should yield."

Rudiger groaned deeply.

"Would I had never seen her," he muttered, half aloud.

"The lady was piqued, and followed me to Schönstein, where she claimed my hospitality and exerted all her wiles to enslave me. My brother, she might have done so, but for one thing. On the day she arrived, I was fresh from hearing the first news of thy existence, and that turned my thoughts from love till I had done my duty and found my only brother to give him his rights. Nevertheless, this lady persuaded me to wear her colors for a little space, and to promise to bring her the head of the white chamois, in chasing which so many brave knights had met their deaths. Thou knowest the rest. I came to the Rigi in disguise as a Tyrolese hunter, met thee, and became thy comrade; and then found, alas! that thou wast another victim to the fair and false lady's charms."

Rudiger halted in his uneasy walk and waved his hand to his brother.

"Let her rest," he said, in a sort of husky whisper; "she had done me wrong *then*, that she could not have atoned. For what she hath done *since*, she shall be paid."

Rudolph looked curiously at the other. There was a grave and impassive look on his face he had never seen there before; all the passion departed, to be replaced by a serious gravity that had a certain cast-iron dignity about it.

He went on with his story as briefly as possible.

"It was with the hope of showing thee all her meanness and frivolity that I sent thee to her with my present, and took thee to her chamber that night. It was to save thee from her that I still concealed thy birth, thinking that her disdain for a peasant would preserve thee from her wiles. But it was all in vain. The rest thou knowest. Now, do thy will on me."

He folded his arms and remained silent in the gathering darkness.

Rudiger stopped his pacing to and fro, and demanded:

"What should I do to thee?"

"What thou wilt! Thou art a liegeman of Frederick of Austria, to whom I am a rebel vassal. I am in the enemy's camp in disguise. A word from thee will cause me to hang from a tree, and so leave thee the sole Count of Schönstein."

Rudiger shook his head.

"Thou dost not think that of me, my brother. Rather should I yield thee my place."

His voice was soft and gentle as he spoke. Then he resumed his walk.

"If not for the sake of Austria, then for thy wife, give me up to death. Bertha hates me; thou lovest her, and I despise her."

"Nay, nay, let us not talk of her at all," responded Rudiger, quietly. "I can rule my own house, brother; and its honor shall not be stained by man or woman. To thyself, once more. What wouldst thou now?"

"If Nothing," replied Rudolph, astonished at the query.

"Nay, ask freely. I will do thy will; for thou art the head of my house, and I owe thee obedience, save in respect of my wife."

Rudolph could not see his brother's face plainly in the dark, but the tones of Rudiger's voice were quiet and almost cheerful.

"I ask nothing," he said, in answer. "Ask thou of me, and I will do thy wish, if I can."

"Be it so," replied Rudiger, as if he felt rejoiced at the answer. "Then tell Black Max that I will meet him to-morrow on the field of Morgarten. Tell Hilda that I am thy brother in heart as in blood, and that I ask her to wed thee, if thou still lovest her. Ask the men of Grütli to curse me as little as they may when I am dead, for to-morrow we meet at Morgarten. Wilt thou tell them this?"

"I will," answered Rudolph, gravely. "But, may I not say thou art with us in heart, as of old, my brother?"

"No," said Rudiger, in an absent, weary sort of fashion, as if he felt tired out. "I had almost forgotten the quarrels of the Cantons. I will do my duty to-morrow to my liege lord, and justice shall be done. Be content, my brother, for I will wrong none. Embrace me, before we part."

Hardly understanding how to take this strange change of mood, Rudolph embraced the dark figure in armor, and felt a firm, warm pressure from Rudiger's muscular frame.

Then the knight said:

"Come, my brother, we must be going, now, for the sun has set, and I have the watchword for the night. Thou must pass our lines in safety, for I am thy true brother in blood and heart. Come."

Without another word he led the way out of the tent, and through the camp till they reached the outposts, where he gave Rudolph the watchword, and saw him pass the sentinels in safety, ere he returned to his own tent.

There, once alone, he cast himself down with his head buried on his arms, and remained silent and motionless for more than an hour, thinking over all that had come to his knowledge so strangely that day.

When the servants came to tell him supper was ready, he was unusually quiet and gentle in demeanor; but all observed that he ate but little and was quite thoughtful.

The last thing he did that night was to see that all the horses in his train were fed heartily, and the last words he said to his men were:

"There will be hot work done to-morrow, my masters. Who will follow where his liege lord bids him?"

"We all will do that, Sir Rudiger," answered his squire, a bluff, honest Tyrolese. "Be it for Louis or Frederick, none will desert thee."

Rudiger bowed gravely.

"See that ye hold to your oath of fealty," he responded; "for to-morrow will prove the worth of many a man that thinks he is a fighter. Good-night."

The men dispersed to their tents, and the camp was soon buried in sleep; while the Swiss watchers from the summit of Morgarten gazed with sleepless anxiety at the Austrian fires covering all the country, and thought with gloom of the prospects for the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MORGARTEN.

ONCE more the midday sun shone down on the mountains and valleys of the Forest Cantons, and saw the dust rising in vast clouds, as the Austrian army marched up to strike the Swiss at Morgarten.

The gallant array of knights had taken horse early in the morning, with their armor polished to its brightest, and every man's heart beating high with hope and joy.

The Swiss lay only about ten miles off, they were intrenched on a hill, and had sent word that they were ready to submit to the emperor, if he would guarantee them the liberties given by the dead Emperor Rudolph.

Taking this message as a sign of weakness, the emperor had sent back word that he would bring his answer in person, and had pressed rapidly on with all his force to decide the issue at once.

He had heard the news of the adhesion of the Pope to his rival Louis, and began for the first time to feel the necessity of action. Could he crush these rebels and then turn and defeat Louis with the same army, all might yet be well; but Louis was supposed to be coming down on his rear at that time, and the victory which had before been a mere convenience now became a positive necessity.

The Austrians marched rapidly round the head of the little Egeri See or lake, and saw before them at its southern extremity the renowned slope of Morgarten, rising at a steep angle, full of gardens and vineyards, and crowned by a plateau covered with the rounded boulders that told where the glaciers of many a thousand years before had ground their slow way along from the Alpine solitudes of St. Gothard.

With the reckless boldness that marked his character, Frederick ordered his camp spread

right at the foot of the rugged slope, and had his dinner served in full view of the enemy.

"For," said he, with a gay laugh, "since we have but an hour's work before us to kill all these Swiss fools, we have plenty of time for dinner."

There was some bravado in this, but also some policy; for the emperor wished to show the Swiss his vast superiority of force, to overawe them before he attacked.

The camp was therefore pitched; and the Swiss, looking down on it from the summit of the Morgarten, saw the whole country covered with the smoke of the Austrian fires, and looked soberly at their own little force in contrast. Compared with the host of the enemy they were but a mere handful.

Less than four thousand mountaineers, only one-tenth wearing cuirasses or steel caps, and most of them in their homespun frocks or leather jerkins, stood gathered on the top of the Morgarten.

Their offensive arms were as rude as their other equipments. Some had two-handed swords, others bore pole-axes, but the most common weapons were pikes and those rude clubs bearing a chain and spiked ball at the end, which earned such a reputation that day as the "Swiss Morning Stars."

There were some fifty or sixty arbalisters among them, headed by William of Altorf; but the armor and horse of Rudolph of Schönstein were the only traces of the regular military science of that age to be found among them.

Rudolph, by virtue of his noble blood and previous services, had won much respect among the Swiss, and his opinions were consulted on all occasions.

It was with a grave aspect, not devoid of sadness and resignation, that Werner Stauffacher, the elected leader of the Swiss, spoke to Rudolph as they looked down on the foe, feasting at his ease.

"We shall sup in heaven, to-night, White Rudolph. I fear they are too many for us, after all."

"We can take a man apiece to the other world, at the least, friend Werner," was the cheerful reply. "But we are not beaten yet. Look round thee, and say what thou seest among us."

"Grave faces and pale," answered the old Swiss, soberly. "They are the faces of men doomed to die."

"But not to run."

"Why, no. We can at least stand."

"That is enough. Look down, and tell me what you see there."

"The slope of the Morgarten, all broken with the walls, where the vineyards are terraced up."

"Can a horse climb that hill?"

"He might, but only in places."

"Then no line can ride up here?"

"Assuredly not."

"Good. They must come up on foot, then."

"True. There are plenty there to do it."

"But how many *will*?"

"I know not. All, I suppose."

"Not so. The light horse and the arbalisters will stay in camp, while the knights and men-at-arms will climb the hill in armor."

"Nay," objected the old Swiss; "that were foolish; for how can a man in armor climb at his ease among those rocks?"

"Nevertheless, they will do it, for a knight will never let a peasant go before him in battle."

Old Werner's face brightened up.

"Then they will have hard work to get up here," was all he said.

Rudolph nodded his head.

"So I think, too."

While they were talking above, the emperor had finished his dinner below, and his knights and men-at-arms were mustering for the assault.

The trumpet sounded, and the long squadrons of horsemen came out of their quarters at a trot, forming in a deep mass in front of the camp. Then the emperor issued his orders that all should dismount and advance up the hill on foot, to drive the Swiss wolves from their holes in the rocks.

"And before we go, my lords, we will send them the answer I promised to their supplications for peace. Who will volunteer to ride up there and take it?"

There was a dead silence, for all knew that the message would be one of defiance and insult, and no one cared to venture among desperate men unless backed by an army.

Red Rudiger of Schönstein looked eagerly round him and saw the hesitation. He had gone out in his brightest armor at the head of his horsemen, with a grave and impassive face; and all had noticed the dignity with which he saluted the emperor.

Now he pushed out from his men and said aloud:

"I will go, if none else cares to take the message."

Frederick smiled with a covert sneer as he answered:

"Thou art the best man to do it. Tell these Swiss dogs that the only liberty Frederick of Austria will grant them is the choice between

being hung like felons or killed like men in battle. A good journey to thee, sir knight."

Rudiger smiled proudly as he lifted his hand to his helmet in salute.

"I will tell them the words of Frederick of Austria," he answered; "and I will bring the answer back on the head of this mace."

As he spoke he shook the heavy weapon with which he had beaten down the emperor at the tournament with an air more of defiance than courtesy; then wheeled his horse and rode straight up the slope of the Morgarten on the narrow winding path which was the only way practicable for a horseman.

Without waiting for orders, his retainers trotted after him in single file, and the whole army set up a shout of encouragement to what they deemed a forlorn hope leading the assault.

But there was something in the last words and gesture of Rudiger which produced a singular effect on Frederick.

The young emperor turned to the Margrave of Brandenburg and asked in a low tone:

"Is he true, think you?"

The old noble shook his head in a grave, doubtful fashion.

"We shall soon see, sire. There is hot work before us. Shall we form the assault?"

"Ay, ay, at once. Follow them up before they have time to do more than kill that Tyrolese cow-driver," was the reply, with a coarse sneer.

The margrave compressed his lips, like a man who would like to say something but refrained, and then turned to his work.

Within ten minutes after a dense mass of steel-clad men on foot, carrying their lances as pikes, had formed at the foot of the hill, and began to climb slowly and laboriously up among the rocks and vineyard walls.

Meantime Rudiger, followed by only twenty men, rode up the winding path, as yet unmolested. As he advanced, he waved a white handkerchief in token of a parley, and the Swiss respected it so far as to allow him to reach the plateau alone.

There he found himself met by a dense wall of stalwart men bristling with weapons, and the voice of Werner Stauffacher cried out:

"Thou hast gone far enough! Tell thy message."

"Where is the knight, Rudolph of Schönstein?" cried out Red Rudiger.

A moment later Rudolph was before him, his countenance flushing and paling with a strange mixture of emotions.

Red Rudiger cast down his mace on the earth; threw down shield and sword after it, and cried aloud:

"Men of the Cantons, this is my brother and liege lord. I do him homage, and I crave leave to strike the first blow for freedom against the traitor Duke of Austria below us. God save Louis of Bavaria, emperor!"

The address was so sudden and unexpected that for a moment a dead silence prevailed, and then the Swiss burst into a mighty shout.

"Long live Louis of Bavaria and the liberty of the cantons!"

Rudolph rushed to his brother and flung his arms round him, the mountaineers ran shouting to the edge of the plateau to welcome up the little handful of deserters, for such all saw that they were; and the Emperor Frederick swore a furious oath below them, as he saw, too late, how he had been outwitted by the simple mountaineer.

But there was not much time to be lost. The horses of Rudiger's party were sent to the rear, for it was to be a fight on foot that day; and the brothers of Schönstein found themselves at last side by side under one banner again, banded against the Austrians.

Meantime the men below had not been idle.

Packed in close ranks of steel, impenetrable to arrow or bolt, they came climbing up the steep ascent like a swarm of ants, covering all the ground.

Sternly and with pale faces the Swiss watched them come, as they stood on the brow of the hill, masking the crest, nervously clutching their heavy weapons and awaiting their time.

There were no rifles then to send death afar off. It was grim hand-to-hand struggle or nothing.

The slope was nearly a mile long, and the Austrians, cumbered with their weight of armor—seventy or eighty pounds to a man—tired slowly up and rested often.

Every now and then they would come to a terrace wall of rough stone, six or seven feet high, up which they were obliged to clamber by grasping at stones and setting their feet in the chinks, or else to evade it by going round the flanks and forming above again.

Slowly they advanced, panting and straining under the hot sun, till the sweat ran down under their armor, and some men fell exhausted, half-way up; but ever the main body crawled on, till the whole force was on the hillside, the extreme head not fifty yards below the crest of the hill.

Then on a sudden Werner Stauffacher set a long Alpine horn to his lips and blew a blast which echoed back from the Rigi far away,

when the Swiss raised a terrible shout and ran to the edge of the hill.

A moment later, forty or fifty of the huge boulders which lay scattered on the plateau above the slope were rolled to the edge and went thundering down the hill, leaping from rock to rock, terrace to terrace, and cleaving broad lanes through the Austrian ranks wherever they struck.

And the enemy was so thick that not one stone failed to strike its victims.

All the armor in which the knights had trusted so fondly availed them naught against masses of stone of more than a ton's weight, coming down a slope of forty-five degrees.

The very numbers in which the Austrians had confided only added to their discomfiture now, for they made more men to kill.

There were no gaps through which a rock might roll harmlessly, and every man saw dead comrades all round him.

Still they fled not, these stubborn German cavaliers, but raised a great shout of "God save the emperor!" and began to climb desperately up, forgetting in the excitement all fatigue and heat.

But the Swiss had counted on this very thing and had rolled a great store of these huge boulders to the edge of the plateau, where they were packed so close that they had been taken for a wall by the Austrian scouts.

It was only necessary to pry them over with the long levers laid in readiness by them and down went a second, third and fourth line of the terrible missiles, till the whole hillside seemed a waste of bounding rocks, thundering down in clouds of dust and crashing through lines of mailed men as if the latter had been eggshells.

In a few moments the battle had become a wild confusion of shouting men running to and fro on the hill above or striving to climb up from below, while the thunder of the rushing boulders never ceased, and then came a wild shout of triumphant fury, as Red Rudiger sprung out, mace in hand, and led the way down the hill, followed by all the Swiss assaulting in their turn.

The store of rocks was for a little while exhausted, but they had done their work so well that the whole slope of the Morgarten was strewn with dead knights and men-at-arms, or crushed and maimed wretches shrieking in their agony for water.

And worse than all the loss by death, a panic had commenced.

No matter how brave are men, they will not long face death from which not all their skill and strength can save them.

Against that terrible storm of bounding rocks the Austrians had no shelter, and they began to turn in the sheer instinct of humanity overwhelmed.

Then down the slope rushed the Swiss in a straggling line covering the whole field, and then the knights realized for the first time the advantage of an unarmored man among the rocks that he knows how to climb.

Many of the Swiss had thrown away their cuirasses before they came rushing down, so as to give a freer play to their muscles, and now they plied their huge axes and "morning stars" with fearful effect, so that in a very few moments the whole body of proud knights was converted into a fleeing mass of utterly demoralized and panic-stricken wretches, who knew not whither they fled, or fell down and allowed themselves to be butchered as unresistingly as sheep.

But before all the Swiss, in spite of the incumbrance of his armor, leaped the gigantic figure of Red Rudiger, wielding his huge mace, and wherever he struck down went an Austrian.

The vengeful knight had seen at the foot of the slope the black eagle of Austria on its yellow flag, and knew that in the little group of horsemen surrounding that flag rode his enemy and rival, the Emperor Frederick.

Before he rushed down the hill he had hastily called up his squire, and bid him wait till the slope was cleared of foes, after which he was to ride down the winding path as best he could, leading the charger of his master.

The slope was clear now, and the country below was one mass of fugitives dashing through the camp. As Rudolph had foreseen, the rabble of cross-bowmen and couteliers only waited to see the annihilation of the armed knights, when they fled in wild confusion, carrying off what plunder they could and a great part of the horses, leaving only the heavy chargers that could not run fast enough.

Rudiger stayed his course at last at the foot of the hill, and saw the eagle banner vanishing in the vast cloud of dust that covered the whole field and marked the fugitives' course.

He looked round for his horse, and it was not in sight yet, so he ran on to a dark mass that showed where the chargers of the dismounted Austrians were still picketed, neighing to each other and abandoned by their cowardly grooms.

In a few minutes he had led out one of them and climbed into the saddle, then rode off on the track of the fleeing Frederick, his whirling

brain full of only one idea, vengeance on the man who had won from him Bertha's love.

The field was full of Austrians and not a Swiss was in sight in the camp, but none the less the wild knight galloped on, waving his mace, into the midst of thousands of foes, shouting:

"Death to the Austrians!"

The dust was thick and blinding, and the camp was empty of the last Austrians, as Rudolph of Schönstein, less rash than his red brother, rode down the slope of Morgarten, followed by the retainers his brother had yielded up to him that day, and began to mount up the straggling Switzers on Austrian chargers, to organize a regular and systematic pursuit.

He had not far to go ere he struck the rear of the enemy, for the cessation of hostilities when the Swiss began to plunder the camp, had encouraged the others to lag behind; and before he had gone a mile he had taken several prisoners who had not been able to steal horses in the rout and confusion.

From these he learned that a gigantic knight, mounted on a gray charger, was riding all alone after a whole army, shouting: "Death to the Austrians," and in this knight he speedily recognized his brother.

Knowing well what the consequences must be should the enemy find out that Rudiger was alone, Rudolph urged his men to speed, and galloped on after the cloud of dust that was now vanishing in the distance.

Pretty soon he came up with the stragglers, and the merciless Swiss began to cut them down, driving the rest to still greater terror, so that the whole cloud of fugitives drove along like a mob of mad cattle, where there was no leisure to distinguish friend from foe.

And then at last, in the midst of the road, they found a fallen horse, shot through the eye with a cross-bow bolt; and standing by it, shaking his fist at the fleeing Austrians, and cursing bitterly in his rage, was the mad knight, Red Rudiger, who seemed to have completely lost his senses through sheer rage and fury.

"As thou art a true knight, give me thy horse, brother," he shouted, frantically, as Rudolph rode up. "I had almost reached the caiff Duke of Austria, and might have slain him, when a Genoese villain shot my horse dead. Give me a horse, for I must slay him, and none other can do the office for me."

"Thou shalt do so," answered Rudolph, more calmly, and trying to soothe his excitement: "but we cannot do it alone. We should but be giving ourselves into his hands. Bethink thee that they have many thousands left yet, and we are less than fifty. Give this rabble time to scatter, every man to his home, and we can follow him at our ease, and slay him, too. I know where he will flee."

"Where?" asked Rudiger, eagerly.

"To Schönstein, of course. Let us be there before him, brother. It is meet that we should both be there together, to see that the honor of our house be not betrayed by others."

Rudiger became calm in a moment.

"You are right, my brother and liege lord," he said. "I will obey your orders."

"Then on to Schönstein as soon as we can get thee a horse," was the answer.

CHAPTER XXX.

BERTHA.

THE Lady Bertha von Schönstein was seated majestically on the justice chair in the great hall of Schönstein Schloss, dispensing her pleasure in the fashion of a great lady, and gaining the hearts of all her retainers by her beauty and affability.

The gay lady had come to her castle determined to conquer, and so far had succeeded well, thanks to the astute counsels and experience of Master Martin. That wily old lawyer was by no means ignorant of the politics of the day. He knew as well as his master the shaky foundation on which the throne of Frederick rested unless he could conquer the Swiss first and Louis of Bavaria afterward. Master Martin had therefore determined to make hay while the sun shone and lay up store for himself against a rainy day.

Thanks to an accident, he had acquired a certain influence over the emperor and that influence he was determined to shape to his own advantage.

He had been sent to Schönstein to take care of the lady's interests, and his first step was to make her as popular as possible and himself known as her prime minister and adviser.

The future depended on two things.

First, if the emperor beat the Swiss and Rudiger was slain in the battle, Master Martin's prospects were sure.

Second, if the emperor was beaten by the Swiss, in which event Rudiger was to be killed, Master Martin was ready to marry the widow and do homage to the new emperor.

But his calculations had two fatal defects.

He had not provided for a beaten emperor and a live Rudiger.

And he had neglected to foresee the possibility that a careless libertine like Frederick might do what he actually had done, leave his letters lying around.

So far things had suited the shrewd notary perfectly. Bertha had obeyed his advice implicitly, and had taken great pleasure in winning the hearts of the retainers.

When they came there they found the cottagers sullen. They had loved their old lord Rudolph so well that they did not take kindly to Rudiger's rule, and the departure of the new knight for the wars, taking with him the flower of the people, had augmented their discontent. But when they saw Bertha and learned that this beautiful lady was to be their mistress, they were pleased and curious; and when she announced that she would hold an audience for all her retainers they were delighted.

It was now four days since she had done this regularly, and in that time she had completely won the hearts of the simple villagers, so that they were ready to swear that never before was lady so beautiful and gracious.

Rudolph and Rudiger were alike forgotten in the new face, and seemed likely to stay so.

And now it was noon of the fourth day, and Master Martin in his office as high steward and seneschal waved his white wand and announced that the audience was over.

The grateful peasants hurried to kiss their lady's hand and then filed out, bowing low; when the countess retired to her private chamber and found herself alone with Master Martin.

"Well, Master Martin," said Bertha, "all goes well. By this time our gracious Lord Frederick has driven his enemies from the field, and I may even see Unterwalden Schloss built again."

"Who knows, my lady?"

"It should be time that we heard from the army ere this," continued the lady, thoughtfully. "My lord Sir Rudiger promised to send a page with the news as soon as they had conquered the Swiss. It is not three days' ride hither from the Morgarten, where they said the enemy were gathered."

"Perhaps my lord may have been hurt in the battle and could not send the news," suggested Master Martin, rather maliciously, to watch the effect on the lady.

He expected to see some signs of joy in her face at the prospect of losing a husband for whom he thought she cared so little.

But to his surprise she turned on him with a scornful curl of her lip and retorted:

"My Rudiger hurt in the battle! Away with such follies! Not all the peasants of the cantons could harm my knight. Didst thou not see him at the tournament smite down strong men like toys, and cast Frederick himself from his horse? Hurt in battle! He is invincible!"

Master Martin opened his eyes very wide at this, and could not help a smothered ejaculation of surprise at her sudden change of tone and manner.

The lady noticed it, and a deep flush mounted to her brow.

"Perhaps," she said, in a confused sort of way, "you think that I do not love my lord, sir."

Master Martin cast down his eyes and made no reply.

"Then let me tell you that I do," she retorted, angrily. "A knight such as he cannot be found every day, and any woman in the land might be proud to have such a husband as he—noble to his heart's core."

Master Martin raised his brows and shoulders slightly as he murmured:

"Noble, my lady?"

"Ay, noble, my lady," she retorted, with still more earnestness. "Dost thou know, Master Martin, that Sir Rudiger is noble by blood?"

"No, my lady, unless it be by the bar sinister. I have heard it said that he was like enough to Mad Rudiger to be his son."

"And who said it?" she demanded, sharply and suspiciously.

"The people of the village who saw him when he came here."

"Well, Master Martin, then look at this, and see how a woman can find more in one day than your clerks with all their learning. Thou hast seen the chest full of parchments in this very room, and yet never thought to search for this."

As she spoke, she held forth to him the very document of which Father Hilary had told her husband a day or two before, and in which the dead knight declared Rudiger to be his lawful son, and enjoined Rudolph to seek and cherish his brother as soon as he attained years of manhood.

Master Martin was not one given to being easily surprised and had much control over his face, yet he could not avoid showing his astonishment and chagrin as he read the paper.

When he had finished he observed in a sarcastic tone:

"I must congratulate my lady on having had such good fortune. Not every woman can turn a peasant into a lord in real truth. His majesty will be glad to learn that he has put his fief into such good hands."

It was the first time he had let his real nature come out before Bertha, and the first time (since the unwary exposure of his plans to Rudiger,

while not valiant) that he had varied from his usual servile courtesy of manner.

Bertha gazed at him with some surprise and more haughtiness.

"Master Martin," she said, "have I ever given thee cause to think that I did not love my noble lord in all honesty and sincerity?"

Master Martin was piqued and lost his temper, so that he replied still more bitterly:

"None, save that which all the world knows; why his majesty married you to this great wolf of the Rigi."

Her eyes began to flash.

"And why was that, sir?"

"My lady knows as well as I. We need not mince our words here," was the bitter answer. "The emperor loves you and all the court knows it."

"And because the emperor loves me he took pains to give me to another; is it so, Master Martin?" asked Bertha, sarcastically. "Methinks thy wit fails thee to-day. Let the emperor love whom he pleases; I love my lord Rudiger, the knight who dared to overthrow the first man in this empire before all his nobles."

Master Martin grinned sardonically.

"Sits the wind in that corner? I am dumb as a stone, then."

The notary, though he strove to hide it, was angry and alarmed. He did not know how the fickle creature before him had been captivated by the victory gained by her husband over the emperor. So far as he or any knew she was as yet guiltless, save of coquetry before all the world with the emperor. The designs of the latter toward her were patent; but even the scandal-loving ladies of the court had been unable to say anything against the Countess Bertha's fame, save that she had been hunting with his majesty while her husband was away, and had seemed to care but little for Rudiger's absence and danger.

The fact was that Bertha had been wavering in her allegiance, tempted in various directions, ever since she had come to court. She saw that the emperor loved her, and had cherished vain hopes of becoming empress herself, hopes that were suddenly dashed when the emperor publicly gave her away to Red Rudiger.

Then she understood too well what his love portended to her, and it was with mingled feelings of bitter disappointment and keen wish for revenge that she had married the rough knight.

Since the tournament her hesitation had changed to firmness. For the time being she was fully and fairly in love with Rudiger, and resolved to be faithful to him.

Master Martin stood by the window, revolving all these facts in his mind, when he became aware that a column of horsemen, preceded by several couriers, was approaching the castle. He could see the dust rapidly rolling down the valley, and the glitter of armor that told of men-at-arms.

Bertha saw him looking out, and divined the cause, for they were all anxious for news.

"Some one comes; is it not so?" she asked, eagerly. "Heaven send it be my lord covered with glory."

Master Martin looked out very earnestly, and finally said:

"It is the banner of the empire. His majesty himself is coming."

Bertha turned paler than her wont, as she asked:

"And is my lord's banner not to be seen anywhere?"

Master Martin drew in his head, and turned to her with a triumphant look of malice, as he answered:

"No. The emperor has vanquished his foes, and returns to Vienna. We can do no less than offer him the hospitality of the castle."

Bertha rose up with an air of forced resignation.

"His majesty is welcome whenever he honors us with his presence. I will welcome him in my brave lord's name."

Then she went down-stairs to the great hall.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE EMPEROR'S VISIT.

THE Emperor Frederick of Austria rode at the head of his escort, as splendid in outward appearance as ever. It is not always the great chiefs that suffer most in a defeat; and the insignificant force of the Swiss had prevented them from taking full advantage of the victory they had won at the Morgarten.

The old Margrave of Brandenburg, cautious and cool as ever, had collected a respectable remnant of the fugitives, and saved part of the emperor's baggage, so that the luxurious monarch had suffered but little in his flight, save for the fatigue inseparable from rapid traveling.

Now he rode proudly up to the castle gate, his armor glistening in the sun, and soon discovered the graceful form of Bertha, all splendid in silks and jewels, standing at the front of the drawbridge, surrounded by her retainers to welcome him; while all the peasants of the village were running out to stare at the brilliant cavalcade.

"By my faith, margrave," said Frederick,

gayly, as he rode up to the castle, "this looks like our days at Zurich once more. I must perforce stop at Schönstein to taste the joys of peace, if only for a week."

"A week!" ejaculated the old noble horrified. "Does not your majesty know that it is of the last importance that we should reach Vienna as soon as possible, to collect our forces in the Duchy of Austria? We cannot afford to rest here more than one night, at furthest."

"And I say that I must stay a week," retorted Frederick, in his sharpest tone. "What now, my lord? Because these Swiss devils, with their cursed rocks, have scattered my army, must I be hectoring by my own courtiers as I were a boy? I will stay here a week."

The old margrave had lost a great deal of his respect for the emperor since the disaster of Morgarten; perhaps the more readily because he loved and clung to him in all his misfortunes. When other nobles bowed and smirked as politely as ever, just before they deserted the fallen emperor and went to pay their duty to the rising one, the stubborn old margrave stuck to his duty and grumbled as if he had been a malcontent.

"Your majesty will at least reflect," he said, hotly, "that this castle belongs to one of two men, either of whom is now your bitter foe. We have here but fifty lances, and a rabble of useless footmen. We cannot make head against Louis of Bavaria if he comes hither, and our only safety is in Vienna, where our friends are many and faithful."

The emperor laughed his old reckless laugh as he retorted:

"So much the more reason we should take possession of this castle. We are here in our own faithful Tyrol, and we can do as well here as in Vienna—nay, better. I shall remain here, and thou canst go on to Vienna, raise our forces, and come back hither to meet me."

Without waiting for an answer, the emperor rode up to Lady Bertha, saluting her before the rest with ceremonious courtesy, to which the lady responded in the same way.

Then she said aloud:

"Welcome and glory to our Lord and Cæsar, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, who has beaten his foes and comes home in triumph to his people."

The emperor bowed again, and then dismounted and advanced to kiss the lady's cheek, according to the sovereign custom of the day.

As he pressed her hand, he whispered:

"At last, my love; and the meeting is all the sweeter for the time I have had to wait."

A crimson flush swept over her brow as she heard the whisper, but she retained her command of feature otherwise, as once more she formally welcomed the emperor to "his castle of Schönstein where all were ready to die for him."

The young monarch smiled in his most courtly manner and proceeded to the great hall, where he found the servants running about like mad folks to make things ready, all frightened and awkward at the unusual honor which had brought an emperor to their gates.

Within an hour after, the imperial train was established in the castle; the emperor had dined; Master Martin had marshaled in the retainers to do obeisance; and Frederick, already tired of the respect and ceremony, began to yawn; the more so that the Lady Bertha had kept aloof from him, except in the presence of the whole crowd.

After dinner, she had prayed to be excused for a while, and Frederick, however loth, had been obliged by courtesy to grant the request.

Therefore the young emperor began to yawn and frown, and presently turned to the old margrave, saying:

"Perhaps thou'rt right. 'Tis but cold comfort here, and we were as well or better on the road to Vienna."

The old soldier's face brightened up at once.

"I will order out the men, then, sire. We lose valuable time here, and, by my faith, I feel uneasy every moment till we are on the road."

Then the margrave left the hall, humming a cheerful tune, and speedily routed out all his men, grumbling sorely at having to leave their comfortable quarters, but nevertheless far from easy in their own minds at the prospects before them.

They had been careful to conceal from the people of the castle the defeat they had suffered; and found the task of inventing accounts of the battle a difficult one.

In those times of anarchy, when rival feudal lords were going up and down all the time, it was enough to be defeated to lose all of one's friends; and only one noble had remained to the emperor in his troubles; the old margrave.

The rest of his suit were common men-at-arms, and this fact alone served to excite the curiosity of the peasants and to provoke plenty of questions awkward to answer.

Therefore it was not difficult to get the train together on the plea of a hasty trip to the capital of Austria, and the old margrave came back in half an hour to the hall to report to the emperor that all was ready for the march.

He found the young monarch gone from the

hall, and in his place Master Martin, who, in a curt and disrespectful manner, told him that the orders were to unsaddle again. The emperor had changed his mind.

Albert of Brandenburg reddened angrily as he heard this.

"What!" he asked. "Has his majesty no better messenger to send to a noble of the empire than a scurvy clerk like thee? Where is he?"

"Faith, where should he be! in the pleasance with my lady," was the indifferent answer.

"Where is this pleasance?" asked the margrave, sternly.

"Does your lordship wish to see his majesty? He left orders that he must not be disturbed."

The old margrave stamped his foot with an oath.

"Now, by the fame of Rudolph of Hapsburg, this is too much," he cried. "Lead the way instantly, thou scurvy knave, or I will cut thee into small pieces."

As he spoke he drew his sword and rushed at Master Martin so savagely that the notary cried out:

"I will take your honor at once, but I only obey his orders. It is this way, my lord."

And he made his exit with more haste than dignity, leading the angry knight through the long corridors of the castle, till they emerged in a little garden, surrounded by high walls, on north, east and west; but opening to the south over an abrupt precipice into the valley of the Inn.

This little garden, with its southern exposure, went by the name of the "castle pleasance," and deserved its name; for, though small, it was a perfect bower of beauty.

Master Martin, astute as ever, and seeing the caution with which Bertha was avoiding the emperor, had watched until he was certain that she was alone in the little garden, when he had hastened to tell Frederick.

The pleasance was in fact the only place in the castle where there was any positive privacy, for it was surrounded by blank walls, no windows looking into it, and communicated by a passage with the lord's chamber.

The margrave could never have found it alone, and even his war-hardened old face relaxed somewhat from its grim expression as he smelt the rich perfumes of the jasmynes and roses with which the pleasance was filled and saw the purple grapes that hung in clusters from the walls.

But he frowned angrily when he saw in the midst of the garden the emperor himself, his armor changed for the velvet robes of peace, while he lay on a pile of cushions before a rustic seat whereon sat the Lady Bertha.

Frederick seemed to be quite happy and satisfied with his position, for he did not even start at the clank of the margrave's armed foot-steps.

He merely looked lazily round; surveyed the old warrior with languid interest, and observed:

"Well, margrave, punctual as ever, I see. If the men are all ready you can take them on to Vienna and return in due time for the work we wot of. For ourself we have determined to stay here awhile, since the gracious lady hath invited us."

The old noble shrugged his shoulders and bluntly retorted:

"Your majesty is then anxious to throw yourself into the power of Louis of Bavaria, alone and unarmed. When we leave this place, who is to defend it?"

"The arms of my faithful people," interposed Bertha, rising up in her most queenly manner.

"I have heard all, my lord, from his most gracious majesty. Deserted by all else, he hath flown hither for a safe refuge; and we will defend him till you return to raise the siege."

The old margrave looked amazed and could not reply.

"Ay, my lord," said Frederick, with the same careless smile with which he had saluted him when he came in, "it is the pride of a liege lord to trust his vassals. We will therefore stay with the lady till we can assure her safety by our arms. Farewell, sir."

He waved his hand to intimate that the audience was over; and with all his careless air, there was an obstinate expression on his face, such as the margrave knew sat there only in the most sullen moods of Frederick of Austria.

Without another word the old noble bowed low and retired from the pleasance, mounted his horse and led the train on its way to Vienna.

"Please God," he muttered, "they shall not say I did not my duty. His blood on his own head."

CHAPTER XXXII.

HUNTING DOWN THE PREY.

THE night had closed in over the village and castle of Schönstein, and all the people were asleep within and without when the tramp and clash of armed horsemen startled the cottagers awake, as a party of twenty knights and men-at-arms trotted into the outskirts of the place, and halted with a great jingling of steel before the house of old Father Peter Bauer, the richest farmer in the valley.

The castle was all dark and gloomy, and there were no lights in the cottages, as one of the armed men dismounted and knocked at Father

Peter's door with the head of his huge mace, crying:

"Open and fear not. It is thy liege lord come home."

Then the horses stood outside and shook their harness, and the men conversed in low tones, till they heard the noise of an opening casement, and Father Peter put out his head and asked quaveringly:

"Who comes to kill us all? Who art thou?"

"Thy liege lord, the Count of Schönstein," answered the man with the mace below. "Open quick, for I would have speech with thee."

The old man drew in his head with an apologetic:

"Coming, my noble lord, coming at once."

Then they heard him come down the ladder, which served in those days for stairway, and soon after he unbarred the door and came out, holding a blazing pine torch and bowing in most obsequious fashion before Red Rudiger, for it was none other that stood before him, in full armor, his open visor showing a pale, gloomy face that frightened Father Peter.

"What has happened since I went away, Father?" asked Rudiger.

"Happened, my lord?"

"Ay, happened, my lord."

"Nothing, my lord, save the coming of my lady and Master Martin to the castle, and good fortune be with them; for we were dull before that, and now all things are merry; feasts every day."

Rudiger listened carefully as if he did not wish to frighten the old man, but his face was as stern and gloomy as ever.

"Has any one else come?"

"Nay, my lord, till to-day."

"And what to day?"

"Surely, my lord has heard the news of the great victory that his majesty won over those Swiss barbarians."

"Think that I have not, and tell me all."

"Why, my lord, the emperor was here himself this very morning, and passed away to Vienna again in the afternoon."

Here Rudiger turned on him with his first abrupt movement.

"Went on again! Art sure?" he asked, with such fierce eagerness that the old man faltered out:

"I think so—that is—I don't know—"

"No, no, father; the train went on, but not the emperor," squeaked a shrill, quavering voice from the window above, that of the old woman of the house, who wanted to hear all that was said.

Rudiger turned quickly to her.

"Come down," he said, in his gloomy, peremptory way. "Tell me the truth and here are ten marks for thee. Lie, and by my father's bones, I'll burn the house down."

"I come, my lord," croaked the old woman, thoroughly frightened, and down she came in a hurry to stand trembling and shivering beside her husband.

"Now tell the truth, how you are sure that the emperor is still here?" asked Rudiger, sternly.

"We saw him enter and we knew it was he," faltered Dame Bauer; "for the gentlemen of the train told us it was the emperor, and we saw his banner. Oh, my lord, he was a handsome knight in his bright gold armor, with his fair young face and blonde hair. God save the emperor!"

The old woman courtesied as she said this, in the hope of pleasing her master, and was amazed when he snapped out:

"Get on with thy tale. Where went he?"

"To the castle, my lord, and there was my lady, as beautiful as the day, to receive him. Ah, my lord, you ought to be happy with such a lovely lady, who is so kind and knows so well how to entertain an emperor. Holy St. Agnes, I should have dropped down with confusion, but she was as calm as if his majesty had been but a common man."

Looking curiously into the knight's face while she spoke, the old woman was startled by the sound of grinding teeth and saw his bloodshot eyes glaring at the ground as if he were going mad.

Completely appalled she faltered and stopped, when Rudiger turned on her with a snarl like a wild beast, and hissed out:

"Why dost thou stop? Go on, fool; go on!"

"I know not what to say, my lord," she stammered.

"What else sawest thou?"

"Nothing, my lord, for they went into the castle, and we poor folk were left outside. We asked the men for news of the battle, and they told us how the emperor had slain all his foes and was going in haste to Vienna to get more men, and then in the afternoon they blew a trumpet and the soldiers rode away on the road to Vienna with an old knight at their head, but the emperor was not with them, my lord: I can swear to it, old as I am, and so can my daughter Wally; for he kissed his hand to her in the morning, and she has been raving about him ever since. She went out on purpose to see him, and he was not in the train; so he must be in the castle still."

Rudiger remained silent, staring at the ground. All the fire had gone out of his eyes now.

Presently he felt, in an absent sort of way for the pouch at his girdle and put a handful of money into the trembling palm of the old woman, saying:

"That for thy news. Keep indoors till the sun is over the mountain."

Turning away to the group of men-at-arms, who had been silently waiting the issue of the inquiry, he spoke to one of them.

"It is true, brother. We have found him. He is in the jaws of a wolf, at last."

So saying, he swung himself on his horse, and the whole party rode slowly up the narrow winding street that led to the castle, the two brothers side by side at the head of the procession.

"Thou seest, my brother," observed Rudolph, "twas as well not to tell these poor peasants I had come back; for if one arrival frightened them so, another would have driven them clean out of their wits."

Rudiger answered irrelevantly:

"How shall I kill him?"

"Please Heaven that may not be necessary," answered Rudolph, hastily. "Thou knowest, brother, I never loved thy wife, but I would not do even her an injustice. She may have entertained the Duke of Austria with all courtesy, and yet do no crime. Remember that though no longer emperor, he is still Duke of Austria, and the Tyrol is still his domain. Thou, at least, art bound to do him all honor, for he gave thee this fief to hold for thine own."

"Which I may not do, for thou art my liege lord," retorted Rudiger, obstinately.

"Not so," was the equally firm reply. "I am one who cannot be two things at once. I have wed the sweetest maid in the Forest Cantons, and I would rather to-day remain a free farmer of the Rigi, with Hilda for my bride, than come back here and be Lord of Schönstein and sport of the intrigues of a licentious court. Thou art, and shalt remain, lord of this valley, my brother. I will none of it."

Red Rudiger put out his right hand in the darkness and grasped that of his brother in a silent clasp of confidence and affection.

"Be it so, my brother," he said, in low, husky tones. "I will not disgrace our race by my deeds, and any stain that another may put there shall be wiped out in blood."

"Nay, nay," answered Rudolph, as earnestly as ever; "I pray thee not to do things rashly at any time, my brother. Promise me that thou wilt be cool in judgment."

"Thou thyself shalt see justice done and shalt hear all," replied Red Rudiger, in the gloomy way in which he had spoken all along.

Then they came in front of the dark outlines of the castle, and beheld the glimmer of the stars in the black mirror of the moat beneath them.

The drawbridge was up and the portcullis down.

Rudiger looked down at the moat and up at the frowning gray walls and asked:

"What shall we do, brother? If we sound our horns for the warder it will warn all within that we are coming."

"Better so than to enter like a thief in the night," replied the other, decisively. "Sound thy horn, and let the world know that the lord of this valley has come to his own place."

Rudiger blew a long blast on his trumpet, and almost instantly heard the clash of steel, as the warder, who slept armed by the gateway, hurried to the wicket and hailed them.

"Who comes hither so late?"

"Rudiger of Schönstein, thy lord and master. Open quickly, for I have ridden far."

"God be praised," ejaculated the old warder, "I will open at once."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT THEY FOUND.

THE brothers had expected more trouble when they heard that the emperor was in the castle, but they felt reassured as the drawbridge came creaking down on its rusty hinges, and pretty soon they saw the old warder working the winch, in full sight.

It was the same old man who had formerly been seneschal and steward, till displaced by the ready Master Martin; and he began to talk aloud even before the bridge was fairly down.

"God save my good lord, even if he be not as good as our old lord, Sir Rudolph. Ah, my lord, they have strange doings here to-night. I am right glad to see your lordship come back again."

Rudiger rode over the bridge, and the rest of the warder's speech was lost in the thunder of hoofs on the hollow planks.

The old man waited till the last were in, when he let go the winch and let the heavy portcullis fall again, dragging up the bridge by its greater weight.

When he came back into the court he found Sir Rudiger and all his men dismounted, and then for the first time recognized the face and form of his old master.

Sir Rudolph checked him as he would have fallen at his feet, and laid his hand on his shoulder, saying kindly:

"Kneel not, old friend. This is my brother, and to him have I given up all my rights as

lord of this domain. Obey him, if ever thou didst love me."

The old man did not know what to say till Sir Rudiger asked, looking up at the silent ramparts:

"Where are all the men? Is there no guard set?"

"Oh, my lord," the old man replied, in a mournful tone, "that is the worst of all. We have none left in the village but old men and boys, and yet they are feasting and drinking within, as if we were in no danger. Thank Heaven you have brought the men back."

Rudiger caught at part of his sentence and demanded:

"Feasting and drinking? Where? I see no lights in the castle."

"They are all in the pleasance, as was my lady's whim, my lord. His majesty told her of some feast they had in Italy, where they light up the gardens with lanterns and sing in the open air, and she must needs have such a feast in the pleasance, while the country is full of robbers and we might be attacked at any moment."

The old warder thought of nothing but the dereliction from military duty implied in the proceeding, but Rudiger's voice was stern and hoarse as he asked:

"Are they alone, he and my wife?"

"Heaven save us, no, my lord. There is Master Martin and the music. Hark! They sing now."

All in the court were still, and could hear, distinctly but faintly, from the other side of the castle, the sweet notes of a chorus in parts, floating along the night air.

Rudolph took his brother aside.

"Thou seest that there is no harm done yet. Remember what I said to thee. He is thy liege lord, and thou art bound to do him reverence till thou hast proof of more than mere folly and empty-headed gallantry."

Rudiger bowed his head gravely.

"Thou art always right, my brother. Let us go into the castle and see what they are doing. The battle is over; and if we have our lord in our power we can afford to be generous to him. Be it so."

He gave a few orders to his squire, who took possession of the castle at once. The horses were taken to the stables, a regular guard set on the ramparts; and the old warder rubbed his hands cheerfully as he began to see that the place was at last safe from immediate capture by assault.

But all this time nothing was heard from the interior of the castle, save the occasional strains of the music from the pleasance.

It was evident that the occupants were too intent on their pleasures to take any heed of possible dangers from their carelessness.

"This man must be a fool," said Rudiger to his brother in a low voice, as the two entered the hall through the great door and found all dark and empty. "He must have known that I would follow him to the ends of the world rather than fail of meeting him."

"He knew not that I was with thee," answered Rudolph. "Had we to depend on those cautious Swiss we should not be here now, for not a man would stir beyond his canton."

"But he knew I had my own men."

"Perhaps he thinks that those men will never raise their hands against their liege lord. I have told thee before, brother, and I say it again: do nothing rashly to-night."

Rudiger said no more; but the two traversed the hall in silence, groped their way to the dais, and were about to enter the passage at the rear of the hall, leading to the interior of the donjon, when they saw a gleam of light coming toward them, and Rudiger signed to his brother to step back to one side of the doorway, while he took the other, out of sight of any person who might be coming.

Presently the light shone out into the hall, and Master Martin, carrying a lamp and walking with rather unsteady steps, entered the place, set down the lamp on the table, and began talking to himself in a manner that showed he must be more than half-drunk.

"Well, of all the nights I ever remember, this is the merriest, by St. James of Jerusalem. To be clinking cups with the emperor himself, and be promised the order of knighthood! 'Fore Heaven, 'tis an excellent jest! What would Sir Rudiger say if he could see us all to-night?"

Then he looked contemplatively at the lamp and continued:

"What a fool is a peasant who tries to be a noble. Here is Sir Rudiger now, who comes of good blood, for my lady says it; and yet he has been brought up a peasant, and we men of the court twist him round our fingers as if he were a child. But, who cares now? 'Fore Heaven, 'tis a most excellent jest."

And Master Martin began to laugh at his own wit in a foolish, drunken fashion.

All the while Rudiger had been contemplating his antics with a stern and gloomy face; too gloomy to notice the humorous aspect of the affair. Comical as were the owlish gravity and silly laughter of the fuddled notary, not a smile crossed the knight's face. He was past laughing.

Presently Master Martin gave a violent start and said:

"Arouse thee, Sir Martin of Schönstein. Thou forgettest thyself and thy duties. We must see whether the castle be in safety, for it would never do to let some enemy come in and take his majesty prisoner under thy roof. 'Fore Heaven what a jest 'twould be if the pretender Louis should chance in here of a sudden, and find us all dancing and singing! I must see that all is safe, ere I go back. One thing, since his majesty beat those Switzers, there are few who will dare to look askance at him. 'Fore Heaven what an excellent jest is this on Sir Rudiger, who treated me so roughly because I was fool enough to tell him the truth. Who is the fool now?"

Rudiger, whose face had been working strangely, could stand it no longer; and just as the notary was turning away from the table to go to the hall door, the knight made one step forward, and laid his gauntleted hand on the shoulder of Master Martin with the same fierce gripe the other so well remembered.

Master Martin uttered a howl of terror and surprise, and in the first instinct of despair, turned to struggle with Rudiger.

But the gigantic knight gave him one or two shakes with all his force, reducing him instantly to a condition of limp helplessness, when the notary sunk down on his knees to the floor, in default of being held up, and faltered out:

"Mercy, mercy, sir! They told me you were killed."

Rudiger let him drop and demanded sternly:

"Who told thee I was killed?"

"His majesty, sir."

"And where is he now?"

"In the pleasance, my lord."

"Who is with him?"

"My Lady Bertha and the people of the castle, with the zither-players."

"Any one else?"

"None, my lord."

"Where is the garrison?"

"We have none, my lord, till the Margrave of Brandenburg brings them back from Vienna."

"This man is a greater fool than we thought, brother," observed Sir Rudiger, sarcastically. "He has left himself unguarded."

Rudolph, who had been quietly watching the whole thing, nodded silently, and Rudiger remained staring at Master Martin as if he were undecided what next to do.

The half-sobered notary ventured to look up and asked:

"And did my lord really escape the axes of those Swiss dogs? They say 'twas a glorious victory for us."

Rudiger smiled bitterly as he saw that Master Martin was plainly sincere in his belief, and remarked to his brother:

"Thou seest, Rudolph, that he hath lied to them, even when he knows that a few days may expose the truth. Let us go in and take the fool in his pleasure, and so slay him as he should be slain."

Rudolph raised his hand warningly.

"Not so, my brother. He made thee Lord of Schönstein, and he is fallen. He is thy guest, too. See that thou hast proof, and do nothing rashly."

Rudiger made an impatient shake of his head.

"What proof do we want? I have her letter."

"That is not proof."

"Then come forward, in Heaven's name," said the knight, impatiently. "These court subtleties are too much for a plain man like me, brother."

Master Martin had listened to the conversation with staring eyes and face that grew paler and paler as he gradually sobered under the influence of fear.

Now he rose slowly up and asked Rudiger:

"Is it true that Frederick of Austria is beaten by the Swiss, my lord?"

Rudiger scowled at him as if he disdained to answer; but Rudolph, who never lost his coolness, replied:

"It is true, Master Martin, and we are liegemen of the new emperor, Louis of Bavaria, who has been crowned by the Holy Father. The emperor is even now marching on Vienna with an army to depose Frederick and make his brother Leopold Duke of Austria."

Master Martin uttered a cry of joy and ran to throw himself at Rudiger's feet.

"Then I am for my lord henceforth," he cried, fervently. "If my lord will continue me in my office of steward, I can squeeze money from the tenants when none else can, for I know every trick of the law, and—"

"Peace!" interrupted Rudiger, with an expression of unmitigated loathing. "I thought thou hadst some courage, Master Martin, and I would have let thee go in peace hence; but by my life thou temptest me to smite thee to the earth with my mace."

Master Martin arose and drew back, much crestfallen; but the cooler Rudolph interposed in his favor, saying:

"Brother, this is not all well. Let us question the man."

"Ask thou, then. I would none of him," was the gloomy reply; and Rudiger folded his arms and stood like an iron statue while Rudolph

questioned the trembling notary by the dim light of the solitary lamp.

"Tell me, Master Martin, who writes the Lady Bertha's letters?"

"Herself, my lord."

"Dost thou know this letter?"

He held forth as he spoke the letter which Rudiger had taken from the emperor's tent.

"I do, my lord. I took it myself to his majesty before the tournament, and read it on the way."

"How long hath the emperor been enamored of the Lady Bertha?"

"Since they met at Zurich. He wed her to Sir Rudiger, because he thought the knight would be blind out of gratitude. We heard that Sir Rudiger was dead, and the emperor has promised to wed the widow."

Rudiger stamped his foot on the stone floor, till his armor rung again, and whispered hoarsely between his shut teeth:

"So that was the promise to which he was to be true. It is enough. Let who will stay; I go."

Then, turning to Rudolph his ghastly pale face, he continued more calmly:

"Fear not, brother. I will show all courtesy to him, as thou sayest. Follow me, and thou shalt see if I am fit to be the Lord of Schönstein."

As he spoke, he threw down on the floor, with a clash, his heavy mace; cast sword and belt after it; and then strode off without another word toward the pleasance, followed by Rudolph and Master Martin.

The knight had unarmed himself; but there was something so gloomy and wild in his aspect that his followers instinctively felt that he had taken a desperate resolution.

In a few minutes they came to the door of the pleasance, whence the sweet strains of the music were still sounding, as Rudiger flung open the portal and stood, gloomy and menacing, on the threshold.

At the clang of the opening the music suddenly ceased, and there were cries of surprise and alarm from the amazed musicians, who started up and huddled together, gazing in awe upon the glittering figures of the two knights.

In that moment Rudiger saw before him the little bower of the pleasance, gay with colored lamps; the fountain playing merrily in a rainbow of flashing light; the Tyrolean zither-players and singers in their picturesque dresses completing the charm of the scene.

But his eyes passed over all to the center of the bower. There, by the fountain, on a Persian rug, heaped with cushions, lay the handsome, indolent form of Frederick of Austria, holding up a jeweled goblet, while Bertha was filling it with wine.

Then Rudiger stalked into the pleasance with clanking tread, and Rudolph followed in dead silence.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE END OF ALL.

BOTH the emperor and the lady heard the sound of the clashing armor, as much startled as the timid musicians, though they showed it differently. Bertha turned hastily round to look; saw the two armed figures; knew her husband; and dropped the flagon to the ground with a faint scream.

The emperor's eyes followed hers, and in another moment all his lazy grace had vanished.

Up he sprang to his full height, and faced his foes boldly, unarmed as he was, for there was no drop of coward blood in the race of Hapsburg.

"Who comes here?" he shouted in tones of fierce anger. "Who dares to break in on my privacy?"

He had only seen two armed men, without recognizing either, and leaped to the conclusion that this was a plot to murder him.

Rudiger stalked slowly forward into the garden in perfect silence, among the frightened musicians, who stared at him in mute terror. As he advanced, he extended both his arms in the air, as if to show he bore no weapon; and, as he came more into the light, Frederick knew his face, and saw behind him Sir Rudolph and Master Martin.

Then the young monarch, for the first time, changed color. As for Rudiger, he came slowly on, his bloodshot eyes fixed on Frederick, till within some six feet, when he bowed slightly, and said, in a deep, grating voice:

"Your majesty is welcome to my castle of Schönstein. I hope that my lady has entertained you to please your majesty."

Frederick watched him keenly as if he feared something hidden under this veil of ceremony, and gave him no answer till the knight made another step.

Then he waved him back.

"No nearer, on thine allegiance, Sir Rudiger! What means this intrusion?"

Rudiger smiled with a strange expression, as he replied:

"I have but just come home, sire, and I wished to welcome my liege lord in person."

"And dost thou call an entrance like this a welcome?" asked the emperor, as proudly as ever, and never taking his eyes from those of Rudiger.

He looked singularly handsome as he stood there, in his splendid festal garments, all unarmed save for a dagger—a mere toy which every one in those days carried for use at meals.

His blue eyes never flinched, and he faced Rudiger with a boldness that compelled admiration.

The knight bowed low once more.

"They told me that your majesty was royally entertained by my wife in the pleasance, and I was curious to see the feast. I heard the music and came hither; but, lo! the musicians seem to be afraid."

"Well, my lord, and what makest thou of all this?" asked Frederick, boldly. "What would you, my lord?"

"Your majesty's gracious leave to greet my wife, whom I have not seen since the day of the tournament in which your majesty showed such horsemanship," answered Rudiger, in a cold, monotonous way.

Frederick burst into a bitter, disdainful laugh.

"Do I hinder thee, man? Greet her in Heaven's name."

Rudiger retired a step.

"In Heaven's name be it."

Then he turned to Bertha, who had been standing all this time, pale as death, with her hands clasped, gazing alternately at Rudolph and Rudiger.

"Come hither, Bertha, in the name of Heaven. The Duke of Austria permits thee to see thy husband."

This was the ominous greeting of Rudiger to his wife.

Bertha looked at him a moment, and then tottered forward and flung herself on the mailed breast of the knight, where she lay dissolved in tears and murmuring all sorts of broken expressions of endearment.

Rudiger seemed as if he had never noticed her. He kept his eyes fixed on those of Frederick.

The young emperor, for his part, caught at his last words.

"What means the vassal? Dost thou question that the Duke of Austria is Caesar?"

"He was, till the day of Morgarten. Now, the Duke of Bavaria is Caesar Imperator, crowned by the Holy Father at Rome. Ere the sun sets to-morrow he will be here with an army to claim his own and crush all rivalry."

It was Rudolph's voice, sad and solemn, that said this, and for the first time Frederick started and looked uneasy.

He recovered himself in an instant, however, and replied haughtily:

"I hold my own rights against all. This castle is a fief of Austria, and its lord owes me allegiance, as duke paramount."

"The emperor hath deposed thee from the dukedom in favor of thy brother Leopold, who hath done him homage for the fief at Zurich, and confirmed the liberties of the Swiss cantons."

Again it was Rudolph who spoke, but it was the fiery eyes of Rudiger that watched the effect of these successive blows on the pleasure-loving young monarch.

Frederick listened incredulously, and laughed out scornfully:

"Lies! lies! I will but ride into Vienna, and all the people will rise to fight for me."

Rudolph bowed and fell back, and it was Rudiger, stern and gloomy as ever, who took up the parable.

"The Duke of Austria would have done well to ride with Brandenburg while he could. Now, it is too late."

"Too late, sir! What mean you?"

"That this castle is in possession of the vassals of the emperor, Louis of Germany."

Frederick stamped his foot with mingled amazement and rage.

"Thou art my vassal whom I made a knight from a low-born peasant. I charge thee on thine allegiance give me a horse and arms, that I may go my way."

"It is too late. I have sworn fealty to Leopold of Austria, and I hold thee only for my deadly foe," answered Rudiger, for the first time raising his tone and showing some of the suppressed fury that boiled within him.

Frederick the Handsome laughed fiercely, and looked more handsome than ever in his wrath.

"Aha! the clown's blood comes out!" he cried. "He has left his courtesy, at last. We are deadly foes. Be it so. The rest, sir? Wouldst break a lance with me?"

"No," was the curt answer.

"And why not?"

"Because I was not bred to the lance, and cannot afford to lose," answered Rudiger, steadily.

Again the fallen monarch laughed bitterly, as he retorted:

"And this is the man that was in the tournament! I was a fool to ennoble a clown. Well, then, how pleases it your nobility to fight, since fight it is?"

"Alone with the cause of our quarrel, and none but God to see the struggle," replied Rudiger, in a deep, solemn tone, that awed the emperor in spite of himself.

As he spoke, he looked down at Bertha for

the first time and laid his hand softly on her head.

"Poor little golden head," said Red Rudiger, softly; "thou art full young and fair to die. Would God I could save thee!"

Bertha, who had been clinging to him all this time, awed by some mysterious meaning in his look, started and spoke for the first time.

"To die, Rudiger! No, not that. I love thee, my sweet lord."

"Alas, sweetheart, thou liest with lips, heart and all. I love thee well, and yet I know thee for a liar who has plotted her husband's death for the love of one who is not even emperor now."

Bertha looked up amazedly in his face. His eyes were full of tears, his voice soft and low, and yet he said such pitiless things. She tried to draw back, but now he had put his arms around her for the first time, and looked down on her with a strange yearning glance.

"Dost thou remember, sweet-heart, the chamois head that Rudolph sent thee, and how we two fled from the castle together? Dost thou remember that I was a free Switzer, bound by an oath to freedom, and that I sold my country, broke mine oath, and became an Austrian for thy love? Dost thou remember how I loved but thee, and how I smote down this popinjay in the fight for thy sweet love?"

She caught at his last words and clung desperately to him, gasping with white lips:

"Mercy, my lord, mercy! He told me thou wast dead. I have not sinned as thou thinkest. I love thee, and I hate him as I hate—"

"What?" he interrupted, softly placing his hand over her lips; "canst thou not die without a lie on thy lips? I have thy letter which he dropped. Dost thou not remember, 'That your meeting might be sweeter!' But alas for the ending, for it is very bitter!"

A haggard, hopeless look came into her blue eyes as he spoke of the letter, though his tones were as gentle as ever. Rudiger kept on gently stroking her hair while he spoke, but he never stooped his lips toward her, as she buried her face on his breast and shuddered violently in dead silence. Then the knight turned to his brother and spoke in the same gentle, melancholy tones that he had used to Bertha.

"My brother, this fief of Schönstein is too much of a burden for me. Do thou and Hilda share it in peace. For me, I shall go back to the Jungfrau and be a hunter as of yore. Will this my wife come with me?"

Bertha, looking wistfully up in his face, whispered:

"Yes, yes! Anywhere with thee!"

"It is enough," answered Rudiger; and with that he began to throw off his armor, piece by piece, before the amazed trio watching him.

Frederick of Austria, for the first time perhaps since he had become a man, felt at a loss what to do. Pride restrained him from fleeing the spot, and moreover there stood Rudolph fully armed, barring the way to the door of the pleasance, while Frederick was unarmed. Bitterly at that moment did he repent that he had not followed his old chamberlain's advice, but had confided himself to Bertha's hospitality. He could only stand there in silence, watching his foes and clutching nervously at the little dagger which was his sole weapon.

Meantime Rudiger doffed his helmet and threw off his armor, piece by piece. When a buckle offended him he would turn to his wife and ask her assistance in a manner of the most gentle courtesy, she obeying with trembling fingers, as if she knew not what was coming of it all.

In a few minutes the task was accomplished, and one might see that Rudiger wore the same leathern dress which he had used as a hunter, and in which he had saved Bertha.

He walked up to Frederick once more and said:

"You remember. Such as I was when I brought her to Zurich, I am now—only a man. Thou art another. We are equal. It is enough."

He turned to his brother.

"My brother, I pray thee to take these people away from hence. I have some words to say to this gentleman and my wife, which must be said where there is none but God to hear us. Thou seest I have left my weapons behind, lest my temper should lead me to violence. I prithee embrace me and go."

Rudolph looked wistfully in his face, then closely embraced him in silence; Rudiger returned the embrace warmly, and waved his hand in farewell as his brother left the garden.

"Come back," he said, quietly, "in ten minutes, unless I call thee sooner, and God be with thee, my brother."

"Farewell," was Rudolph's only answer with a sigh, as he drove the musicians and singers, headed by Master Martin, out before him into the corridor and closed the door behind him.

Then the knight walked slowly after them down the passages to the great hall, and said to Master Martin:

"Sit down there; or, if it please thee better, leave the castle and flee to Vienna."

Master Martin trembled as he replied in a low tone:

"If it please my lord, I would rather go to Vienna, if my lord will give me safe conduct there."

Rudolph waved his hand wearily.

"Go to my squire, and tell him it is my order that he give thee a beast and set thee safe on the road to Vienna. Once outside the walls, thou must look to thyself. Thou hast not deserved more at our hands. Go."

Master Martin showed all his native astuteness in bowing silently and leaving the hall, without any effort to obtain more.

Rudolph remained buried in deep and gloomy thought for some minutes, when he suddenly started up with the exclamation:

"I cannot stand it. I must see what he has done."

So saying, he snatched up the lamp, strode off down the corridor and flung open the door into the pleasance, where the lanterns still burned in all their gay colors, and the fountain sparkled and plashed as merrily as ever.

But the little bower of verdure and beauty was silent and empty—of living beings.

There lay the carpet and cushions with the abandoned pieces of armor, the overturned flagon and goblets, marking the interrupted feast. The velvet mantle of the young emperor, bordered and lined with ermine, had been cast down beside them; but Rudolph could see no signs of the three persons he had left there in the full vigor of love, hatred and life.

With a smothered exclamation of fear, the knight quickly traversed the garden, searching everywhere for some trace of a struggle.

The place was not large. Fifty feet every way comprehended its largest dimensions, of which the fountain and the little plot of grass round it formed no small part. The vines clustered and climbed up the walls all round three sides, and on the fourth a low railing, marked the edge of the precipice beneath the pleasance, a fall of at least a hundred and fifty feet.

But there was no one in the garden. At least so Rudolph thought at the first glance; and he was turning away with a sob, thinking that all must have been killed, when a faint voice called to him:

"Rudolph! In mercy!"

Starting, he turned again, and saw, crouched among the vines at the very edge of the precipice, clinging to the railing and cowering down with white face and staring eyes the once haughty Bertha.

"What has happened, in God's name, my sister?" he demanded. "Have they killed each other?"

She turned one shuddering glance downward and wailed out:

"I loved him; but he would not believe it; and now he is gone!"

"But how did it happen?" he asked.

"I do not know," she answered, in a wailing tone. "He would not believe that I loved him, and they fought for me, those two, and both fell over the railing together. And now I am all alone. And he would not believe I loved only him."

"And didst thou, indeed?" asked Rudolph, solemnly.

"God knows I did at last," was her answer, "for he conquered all."

The bodies of Red Rudiger and the once-handsome Frederick of Austria were found, when daylight dawned, at the foot of the precipice, where they had fallen on a bed of turf.

Strange to say, neither was much disfigured, and Rudiger was still alive, though insensible. They carried him to the castle and laid him in his own chamber, where Bertha was allowed to attend him, which she did with an anxious care that showed her repentance to be real and sincere.

At last he opened his eyes and saw her.

Then he smiled faintly as she stooped down and kissed him, whispering:

"Oh, my lord, I do love thee indeed."

But his eyes wandered away to Rudolph, who stood by the bedside watching him. The knight knew that his brother was dying.

Faintly Rudiger, the once stalwart warrior who beat down men like children, smiled and whispered:

"Brother, thine the castle—more worthy than I—Forgive her—I have done so. Farewell!"

Then came a bitter cry from the wretched woman at the bedside, who heard herself forgiven, and learned, too late, the value of the noble heart she had cast away; for Red Rudiger fell back dead in his wife's arms.

Many years after that the nunnery of St. Catherine at Prague counted among its most devoted sisters a pale beautiful woman with snow-white hair, whom all the nuns revered as a saint. They wished to make her abbess at last, but she refused always, saying only:

"I am not fit to rule others, for I could not rule myself. I found a pearl and I threw it away on a dunghill. Therefore is there no pardon for me this side of the grave."

But on the other there is hope for all.

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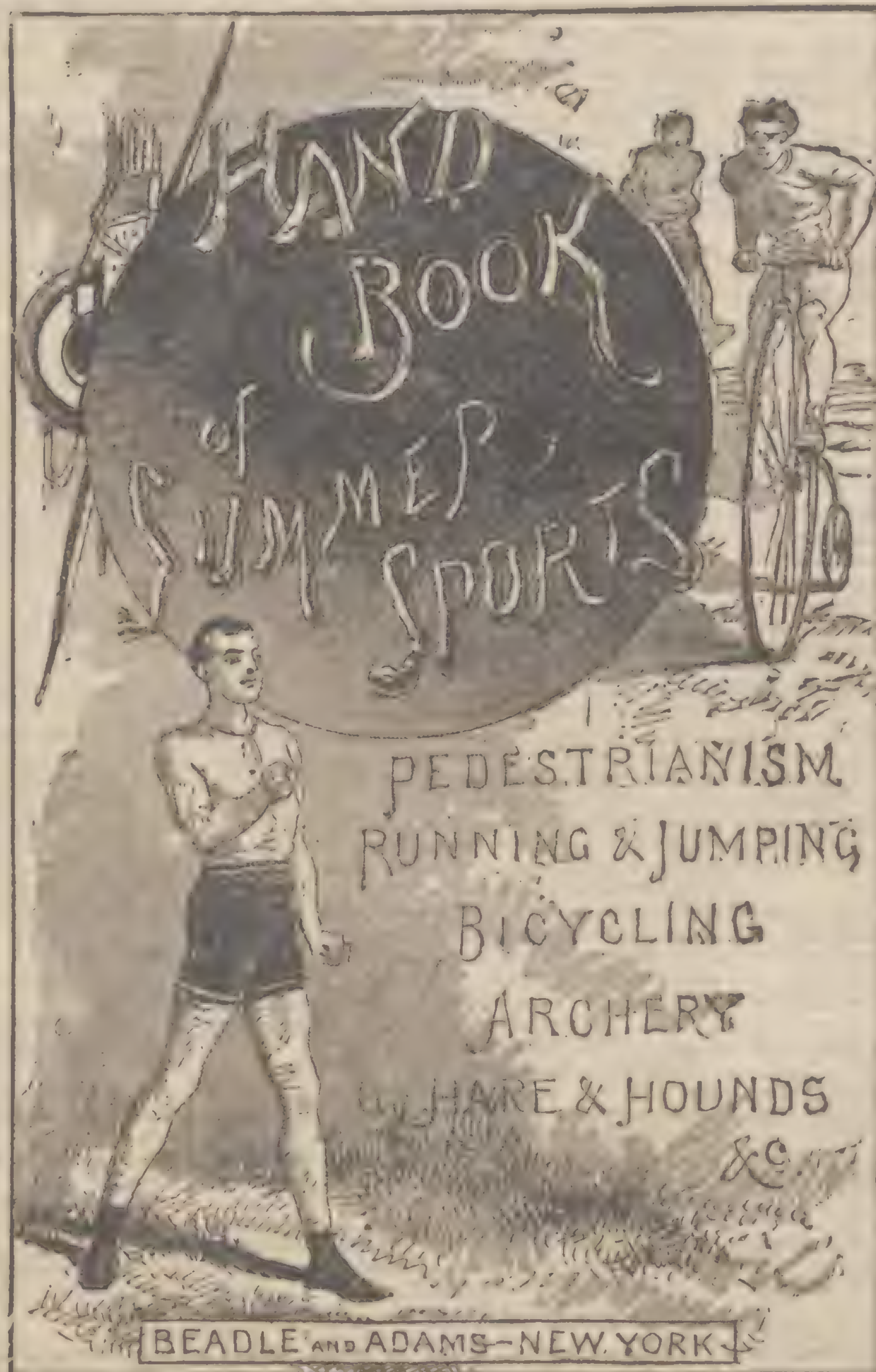
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